A Foreign Legion Yarn by ROBERT CARSE

Short Stories

Twice A Month

July 25th

25c

SOME SINNERS IS POWERFUL RIGHTEOUS

by

Caddo Cameron

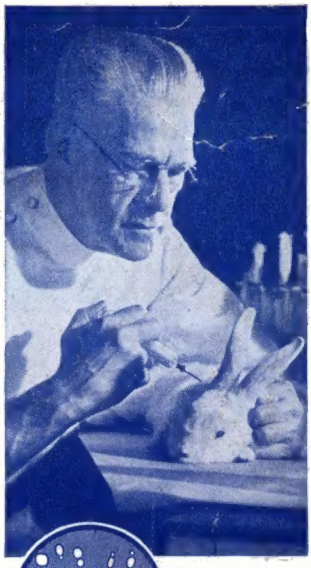
A long novelette

"Not a Chance in the World"

JAMES B. HENDRYX

Sensational Scientific tests prove LISTERINE CURES DANDRUFF

First Science discovered the dandruff germ...then, that Listerine kills it. 76% got quick relief in New Jersey clinic.



Pityrosporum ovale, the germ that causes dandruff, magnified many times.

If dandruff has you in its grip, if you have tried remedy after remedy in vain, here is the most welcome news you could possibly read:

Listerine has been scientifically proved a positive cure for dandruff.

Once or twice a day, just douse full-strength Listerine on your scalp; massage vigorously and persistently until every hair is bathed in soothing, health-promoting antiseptic. Listerine attacks and kills that queer, bottle-shaped germ—*Pityrosporum ovale*, which causes dandruff.

Here is proof

When Science discovered the dandruff germ, an astounding series of experiments immediately followed. Rabbits were infected with dandruff. When treated daily with Listerine Antiseptic, they were cured within two weeks on the average.

In a great midwestern skin clinic, a group of dandruff sufferers applied the daily Listerine treatment. A substantial number of these Listerine users obtained marked relief within the first two weeks on the average. In many other cases scalps were found to be free and clear of dandruff in from three to eight weeks.

In another recent test, 76% of the dandruff patients of a New Jersey clinic who used the Listerine treatment twice a day, showed complete disappearance of, or marked improvement in, the symptoms within 30 days.

Listerine treats dandruff for what it really is

Why use old-fashioned remedies which merely wash away the surface symptoms of dandruff temporarily? Listerine Antiseptic actually cures dandruff, by killing the germ itself.

Start ridding your scalp of dandruff today. Stop the gnawing, burning dandruff itch. Get back the natural health and vigor of your hair. Remember—only Listerine Antiseptic, so far as we know, has a clinical record of such positive dandruff cure.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL CO.
St. Louis, Mo.

LISTERINE the *PROVED* treatment for DANDRUFF

SHORT STORIES issued semi-monthly by SHORT STORIES, INC., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City, N. Y., and entered as second class matter, November 24, 1937, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION PRICE—in the United States, Mexico and American Possessions, $5.00 per year; to Canada, $5.50; and to all other foreign countries in the Postal Union, $6.60; price payable in advance, and including postage. July 25, 1938. Vol. CLXIV, No. 2. Whole Number 782.

T. RAYMOND FOLEY, *President;* WILLIAM J. DELANEY, *Secretary and Treasurer;* D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.*

Enjoy BEAUTIFUL NATURAL-LOOKING FALSE TEETH LOW PRICES 60 DAYS' TRIAL

SEND NO MONEY

Made to order by FIT-RITE improved method BY MAIL, all over world. Finest Quality. MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE YOU WILL BE SATISFIED. We take your word. Catalog and impression material FREE. Write NOW!

UNITED STATES DENTAL COMPANY
Dept. 713 1555 Milwaukee Avenue Chicago, Ill.

ANY PHOTO ENLARGED

Size 8 x 10 inches or smaller if desired. Same price for full length or bust form, groups, landscapes, pet animals, etc., or enlargements of any part of group picture. Safe return of original photo guaranteed.

47c
3 for $1.00

SEND NO MONEY Just mail photo or snapshot (any size) and within a week you will receive your beautiful enlargement, guaranteed fadeless. Pay postman 47c plus postage—or send 49c with order and we pay postage. Big 16x20-inch enlargement sent C.O.D. 75c plus postage or send 80c and we pay postage. Take advantage of this amazing offer now. Send your photos today. Specify size wanted.

Standard Art Studios, 113 S. Jefferson St., Dept. 598-H, Chicago.

FOREST JOBS

available at $125-$175 per month, steady. Cabin. Hunt, trap, patrol. Qualify at once. Get details immediately.

RAYSON SERVICE BUREAU,
B-52, Denver, Colo.

WANTED ORIGINAL POEMS SONGS

FOR IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION SEND POEMS TO
Columbian Music Publishers, Ltd.
Dept. 17. Toronto, Can.

Start a BIG PAY BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN WITHOUT CASH!

SELL WHOLESALE TO STORES

DID YOU make $50 last week? Does your job offer you real future? If not, why not place line 200 nationally advertised products with stores. Sold new way. Bigger profits for merchants. Big earnings for you every week. Start without investment. Get FREE book giving FACTS!

WORLD'S PRODUCTS COMPANY
Dept. 7855 Spencer, Indiana

for MORE PAY learn DRAFTING From An ENGINEER

EVERY INDUSTRY NEEDS DRAFTSMEN AT GOOD PAY. I'll train you on Drafting work until in a good position at better pay. All tools and drawing table furnished to you, if you start now. Write today for FREE BOOK and full details. No obligation.

ENGINEER DOBE Div. B303 Libertyville, Ill.

BE A RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR WRITE TODAY

EARN BETTER PAY WITH THIS TRAINING

A GOOD POSITION is waiting for our trained *Railway and Bus Passenger Traffic Inspectors.* Simple home-study course quickly qualifies you and upon completion, we place you at up to $135 per month, plus expenses, to start, *or refund tuition.* Ambitious men advance rapidly. Free booklet gives our 19-yr. record.

STANDARD BUSINESS TRAINING INSTITUTE
Div. 1307 Buffalo, N. Y.

NOW YOU SHOULD PREPARE for ELECTRICITY

Learn by Doing

Easy Payment Plan

Mail coupon today for details of easy payment plan and famous Coyne "Learn by Doing" method of practical shop training for your start in the Electrical Field. Age or lack of money need not hold you back ... Get training first; then take 12 months to complete small monthly tuition payments starting 5 Months after you begin training.

Shop Training 12 Weeks

Coyne Training is practical, easy to grasp... you learn quickly by doing actual jobs on real electrical machinery and equipment —NOT from books or printed lessons. You don't need previous experience or a lot of book learning. Expert instructors here at Coyne guide you every step of the way.

Diesel Engines, Air Conditioning Electric Refrigeration

Big things ahead in Electricity mean greater opportunities and a real future in this fascinating "live" industry. Rush the coupon TODAY for Big Free Book with dozens of photos of the great Coyne Shops in Chicago, many facts about Coyne Training ...Free Employment Service...many earn while learning...additional instruction in Diesel Engines, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning at NO EXTRA COST and amazing Easy Monthly Tuition Payment Plan.

COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
H. C. LEWIS, President
500 S. Paulina St. Dept. 88-66, Chicago, Ill.

H. C. LEWIS, President, Coyne Electrical School
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 88-66, Chicago, Ill.

Send me, without cost or obligation, your Big Free Book and details of Easy Monthly Tuition Payment Plan.

NAME AGE

ADDRESS

CITY STATE

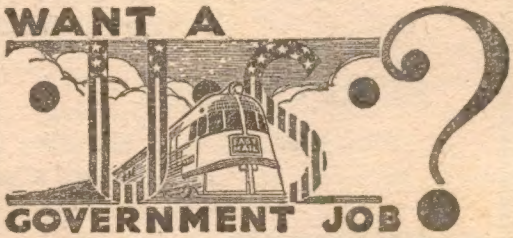
Home-Study Business Training

Your opportunity will never be bigger than your preparation. Prepare now and reap the rewards of early success. Free 64-Page Books Tell How. Write NOW for book you want, or mail coupon with your name, present position and address in margin today.

- ☐ Higher Accountancy
- ☐ Mod. Salesmanship
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Law: Degree of LL.B.
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ Industrial Mgm't
- ☐ Business Mgm't
- ☐ Business Corres.
- ☐ Credit and Collection Correspondence
- ☐ Modern Foremanship
- ☐ Expert Bookkeeping
- ☐ C. P. A. Coaching
- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Effective Speaking
- ☐ Stenotypy

LaSalle Extension, Dept. 775-R Chicago

WANT A GOVERNMENT JOB



START $1260 to $2100 YEAR

MEN—WOMEN Mail Coupon Today SURE.

COUPON

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE
Dept. S242, Rochester, N. Y.
Sirs: Rush without charge, (1) 32-page book with list of U. S. Government jobs. (2) Tell me how to qualify for one of these jobs.

Name.....

Address.....

BIGGEST AND BEST—ACTION

Short

TWICE A MONTH

CONTENTS

NOT A CHANCE IN THE WORLD
(A Complete Novel) **James B. Hendryx** **6**

It Was Shane's Head That Was Red, Not His Tunic, but the Mounted Conceded That He Was the Sort of Man the Law Needed in the North.

THE CAP OF MY UNCLE **Robert Carse** **50**

It Isn't Often That There Are Two Americans in the Legion; and When It Happens Things Also Happen—Especially When One of Them Has a Dog.

WITHOUT EXAGGERATION **William E. Barrett** **61**

The North American Decided That in Describing the Exploits of Their Bad Men, the People of Paraguay Didn't Exaggerate One Bit.

SOME SINNERS IS POWERFUL RIGHTEOUS
(A Long Novelette) **Caddo Cameron** **74**

"Certainly, I Done Heard a Heap of Things About a Fightin' Parson, but It Don't Never Pay a Feller to Believe All He Hears in Texas."

NIGHT CIRCUIT **Howard Nostrand** **101**

Plenty of Paint in the Five and Dime, So Patch Up the Midgets and Clock Their Time.

SOFTPATCH **Roy Churchill** **114**

It Is No Good Putting on a Softpatch When a Repair Job Really Wants Rivetting with Iron.

ADVENTURE, THRILLS, MYSTERY

Stories

Title Registered in U. S. Patent Office

JULY 25th, 1938

PEARLS AT QUARTER MOON
(Second Part of Four) Captain Frederick Moore 124

The Palatial Yacht "South Wind" Anchors at Quarter Moon Island on a Pearling Venture, Only Her Millionaire Owner Doesn't Know That Any Pearls They Find Are Planted Ones.

KILLER GANG **Hugh Clyde 149**

The Killer Gang Had Been Owl-hooting an' Rustling an' Up to Every Kind of Hellishness for Years. Then a Stranger Loped Into the Country.

THUMBER **Frank Richardson Pierce 157**

Old Lady Riley, Rainier Park's Wrestling Bear, Had a Hard Time Convincing Motorists That All She Wanted Was a Lift, Like Any Other Traveler.

ADVENTURERS ALL
A River-rat's Revenge **Harold Wales 168**

THE STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE **171**

ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB **174**

COVER—A. R. Tilburne

The entire contents of this magazine is protected by copyright and must not be reprinted. Copyright, 1938, by SHORT STORIES, INC.

GUARANTEED TIRES!

GOODYEAR · GOODRICH
FIRESTONE · U.S. and
Other Standard Makes

World's Lowest TIRE PRICES

Tire users by the thousands all over the U.S.A. vouch for the Long Hard Service of our Standard Brand tires reconditioned with high grade materials and latest methods by our tire experts. Our 21 years experience makes it possible to offer tires at lowest prices, with legal agreement to replace at ½ price any tire that fails to give 12 Mos. Service.

FREE! LANTERN
With Every 2 Tires ordered

Complete with batteries and newest type reflector bulb. Ready for instant use. Strong, steady light. Useful everywhere. Order now.

EVERY TIRE GUARANTEED!

BALLOON TIRES

Size Rim	Tires	Tubes
29x4.40-21	$2.15	$1.05
29x4.50-20	2.35	1.05
30x4.50-21	2.40	1.15
28x4.75-19	2.45	1.25
29x4.75-20	2.50	1.25
29x5.00-19	2.85	1.25
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.25
5.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.55
33x6.00-21	3.65	1.55
32x6.50-20	3.75	1.75
6.00-16	3.75	1.45

REGULAR CORD TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
30x3½	$2.35	$0.95
31x4	2.95	1.25
32x4	2.95	1.25
33x4	2.95	1.25
34x4	3.25	1.35
32x4½	3.35	1.45

HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES
(High Pressure)

Size	Tires	Tubes
30x5	$4.25	$1.95
33x5	3.95	1.75
34x5	4.25	2.25
32x6	7.95	2.95
36x6	9.95	4.45

Size	Tires	Tubes
33x4½	$3.45	$1.45
34x4½	3.45	1.45
30x5	3.65	1.65
33x5	3.75	1.75
35x5	3.95	1.75

Size	Tires	Tubes
34x7	$10.95	$4.65
38x7	10.95	4.65
36x8	11.45	4.95
40x8	13.25	4.95

TRUCK BALLOON TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
6.00-20	$3.75	$1.65
6.50-20	4.45	1.95
7.00-20	5.95	2.95
ALL OTHER SIZES		

Size	Tires	Tubes
7.50-20	$6.95	$3.75
8.25-20	8.95	4.95
9.00-20	10.95	5.65
10.75-20	13.95	6.45

DEALERS WANTED

SEND ONLY $1.00 DEPOSIT on each tire ordered. ($3.00 on each Truck Tire.) We ship balance C. O. D. Deduct **5 per cent** if cash is sent in full with order. To fill order promptly we may substitute brands if necessary. ALL TUBES BRAND NEW—GUARANTEED—

PERRY-FIELD TIRE & RUBBER CO.
2328-30 S. Michigan Av., Dept. 5443 Chicago, Ill.

FALSE TEETH

SAVE $10 TO $60

Thousands have been perfectly fitted by mail with fine, natural-looking teeth—and at tremendous savings. Don't endanger your health by delay, when it costs so little.

60 DAY TRIAL—We guarantee perfect fit. If you are not completely satisfied, we will refund your money. All work under registered dental supervision.

FREE IMPRESSION MATERIAL—Instruction and Price List—Send No Money. Impressions are easy to take.

DON'T WAIT! DELAY MEANS DANGER!
WRITE FOR COMPLETE DETAILS TODAY!

ORADENTAL LABORATORIES, INC.
Room 420-B, Heuer Bldg. Gary, Indiana

BE A RADIO EXPERT

Learn at Home—Make Good Money

Many men I trained at home in spare time make $30, $50, $75 a week. Many make $5, $10, $15 a week extra in spare time while learning. Illustrated 64-page book points out Radio's opportunities, also how you can learn to be a Radio Expert through my practical 50-50 method of training. Television training is included. Money Back Agreement given. Mail coupon today. Get book FREE.

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 8GM,
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Send me, without obligation, your 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio" FREE. (Please write plainly.) AGE.....

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY..... STATE.....

When Poisons Clog KIDNEYS and Irritate Bladder

JUST DO THIS

Go to your druggist today and get this safe, swift and harmless diuretic and stimulant—ask for Gold Medal Haarlem Oil Capsules and start at once to flush kidneys of waste matter saturated with acids and poisons.

That's the way to bring about healthy kidney activity and stop that bladder irritation which often causes scanty passage with smarting and burning as well as restless nights.

Remember, the kidneys often need flushing as well as the bowels, and some symptoms of kidney weakness are: Getting up once or twice during the night—puffy eyes—cramps in legs—backache and moist palms. But be sure and get GOLD MEDAL Haarlem Oil Capsules—the original and genuine—right from Haarlem in Holland—the price is small (35 cents), the good results will fulfill your expectations.

Doctor's Prescription For Liquor Habit

A doctor's prescription, used for years for those addicted to the use of alcohol is now offered to the public for home treatment. It is not habit-forming and can be taken in liquor, tea, coffee, food, or any other liquid, with or without the user's knowledge. Aids the sufferer to overcome the craving for liquor and to build up his resistance. Many loved ones saved and brought back to a life of usefulness. Money back, if not delighted. Write Western Chemicals, Inc., Dept. 14-G, Seattle, Washington, for a Free trial and full particulars. It will be sent immediately in a plain wrapper. Do it today.

FREE TRIAL

NO JOKE TO BE DEAF

—Every deaf person knows that—

Mr. Way made himself hear his watch tick after being deaf for twenty-five years, with his Artificial Ear Drums. He wore them day and night. They stopped his head noises. They are invisible and comfortable, no wires or batteries. Write for TRUE STORY. Also booklet on Deafness.

Artificial Ear Drum

THE WAY COMPANY
727 McKerchey Bldg. Detroit, Michigan

MAKE MORE MONEY

Taking Orders For The NIMROD Line

Earn more every day in the year representing old established firm with a complete line of fast selling necessities: Shirts, Ties, Underwear, Hosiery, Dresses, Smocks, Raincoats, Summer Suits, Pants, Breeches, Belts, Shoes, Coveralls, Shop Coats, Uniforms, Playsuits, etc. Every item guaranteed. Experience unnecessary. Write quick for FREE SALES EQUIPMENT.

NIMROD CO., Dept. 75,
4922-28 Lincoln Ave., Chicago, Ill.

SONG POEMS WANTED

TO BE SET TO MUSIC
Free Examination. Send Your Poems to
J. CHAS. McNEIL
BACHELOR OF MUSIC
4153-NF, South Van Ness Los Angeles, Calif.

THE question of what becomes of gold in war times has intrigued the world for countless years. No nation wants its gold chests to fall into enemy hands. In Vigo Bay the captains of the Spanish plate ships, cornered by Drake's English, scuttled their ships rather than let the treasure fill the coffers of England. Almost a billion in gold still lies there waiting some lucky salvage crew. So it was inevitable that during the Great War the Germans sought to save their gold; and just as inevitable that stories should spring up about the search for it. Such a yarn is "Death Waits for Divers," a long novelette which leads off our next issue. It is by Wes Fargo, a man who knows the sea, an ex-navy man, and moreover a first-class spinner of tales who felt the romance of the escape of the *Emden*, who knew of the gold supplies in Tsingtau—and who has written a thrilling tale about it for SHORT STORIES readers.

* * * * *

Also in the next issue is one of the H. Bedford-Jones mysterious disappearance stories. B-J has wandered just about all over the world in this series. He's talked of the vanishing of Henry Hudson, of a lost Brazilian banker, of the fate of one of the Old West's best trackers, and this time he tells of the disappearance of an ambassador in Europe. Which, according to the story, "nearly caused a European war, but that didn't help Sir Benjamin Bathurst," or indeed the walled skeleton which was found years later. So look out for "The Strange Disappearance of Sir Benjamin Bathurst."

* * * * *

Frank Gruber reproached us with tying up the wrong character in his last story with Jesse James. We apologize, but still think it was a good story. As is his new long novelette in our next issue—"Winner Gets All." It introduces a new character of the Old West—as far as we know. He was Hungarian, German, Spanish or blatantly American as suited his purposes, and was a gambler from the word go. The chief gamble of the story had to do with ownership of land where two pioneering railway lines were to cross, and there is plenty of excitement, and good sound writing, from the first word to the last.

Coming up in the next issue

It Pays to Keep One's Finger on the Pulse of the North

NOT A CHANCE IN THE WORLD

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

Author of "All the Evidence," "White Blood and Red," etc.

CHAPTER I

ON THE LAKE

RED SHANE eased the staunch little fishing boat off a point or two as her bow caught a huge wave that deluged the net boxes forward of the little cabin and thickened the film of ice on the heavy window glass. He turned to Sleepy Joe who was tinkering with the motor.

"Come here and wheel her, Joe, while I scrape that window. We'll be able to pick up the shoreline pretty quick if the daylight holds. And if it don't, I sure don't want to miss Berglund's light. Hold her due nor'east," he added, as the half-breed slouched forward and took the wheel.

"Better you look out w'ere you step," cautioned the other. "De deck, she all ice. Ba Goss, de boat she jomp roun' lak de rabbit! You fall off you gon' to hell sure."

The little cabin was a three-sided affair, with the after end open. Pausing a moment to throttle down the four-cycle, heavy duty motor to reduce the speed, Shane stepped to the after deck and glanced about, as he fastened his oilskins. The wind roared out of the north in an icy half-gale that lashed the dark waters into huge white-capped waves that slapped the port bow as the little boat wallowed quartering against them, and sent geysers of spray high into the air. This spray froze as it struck. Already the forward deck, net boxes, and cabin were sheathed in half an inch of ice. Overhead low clouds scudded swiftly southward against a lowering sky. The barometer was low, and falling—so was the thermometer. Shane frowned as he noted that it registered only twenty-two. It had been thirty at noon, when they had lifted the last net.

Astern, at the end of a fifty-foot towline, the heavy rowboat used in lifting the nets, bucked and reared on the wave crests and plunged out of sight in the deep hollows. "Hope she don't swamp," muttered Red, as he made his way gingerly along the narrow icy footway to the forward end of the cabin where he removed a scraper fashioned from a safety razor blade set in a wooden handle from its niche, and bracing himself among the net boxes, fell to work scraping the ice from the heavy pane that served as a windshield for the steersman. When the glass was clear of ice, he took from a tobacco tin nailed conveniently to hand, a piece of cotton waste saturated with glycerine and salt, and wet the pane with the mixture. Then he made his way back and took over the wheel.

"You can speed her up again, Joe," he said. "I'd sure like to make Berglund's by daylight. Running that channel at the mouth of the river is nobody's snap. If we'd hang up on the reef on a night like this, we'd lose two tons of fish—and the boat, sure."

"*Oui,* an' mebbe-so we stay in de water wit' de feesh, too" replied the breed somberly as he shoved the throttle lever a couple of notches ahead. "Me, I'm no lak for go on de boat een de winter tam."

"This looks like our last trip for this

year. Damn Berglunds for insisting on this lift! I wanted to make a run to Riverton for supplies before the freeze-up.

"Could have lifted a few days earlier, and sold the fish there, got the supplies, and been back through the narrows by this time. We'll never make it, now. If this wind goes down with the sun, the narrows and the whole lower lake among the islands will be frozen by morning."

THE half-breed slanted him a glance. "Maybe-so Berglun' wan' you git froze in here so you no kin git to Riverton. You no git de supply at Riverton, you got to git from Berglun'. Berglun' say he got to have two ton feesh—he know dat keep you out on de lak four, fi' day longer—mebbe-so de narrows freeze, an' you no kin git to Riverton."

"I wouldn't put it past the damn cusses," agreed Shane, with a frown. "The East River's probably frozen by now, or I'd fool 'em and run up to Norway House for my supplies."

"Berglun' know de narrows froze—know de Heas' Revaire froze, mebbe-so no geeve you mooch for de feesh."

Shane grinned. "No chance for 'em to gyp me on the price. There's two Swedes I wouldn't trust as far as I could throw a bull by the tail. I got a written agreement before I pulled out. They'll take these fish, and they'll pay me my price. Of course," he added a bit ruefully, "they'll probably get it all back, now that I've got to buy my supplies from 'em. I've got to give the boat a complete overhauling this winter. Besides, I need a lot of twine."

"Berglun's mak' you pay damn good for supply," opined the breed. "Dem no lak you, 'cause dey t'ink, mebbe-so Tom Beatty's girl gon marry you, eh?"

"You bet your life she's going to marry me—if she'll have me! But even if she didn't, she'd never look twice at either one of those damned Swedes. Sven isn't so bad, maybe—but Torg's got a bad eye, and he's old enough to be her father."

"Dey got plent' money. Give ol' Tom Beatty mooch plent' debt."

"They can't buy Louise!" retorted Shane, with conviction. "If the Berglunds give old Tom more debt than he can pay, it's just too damn bad for 'em—that's all. Louise isn't responsible for her father's debt."

Sleepy Joe shrugged, and relapsed into silence, tinkering about the motor while Shane stared out through the window kept fairly free of ice by the film of glycerine and salt. At the end of an hour he again called the breed forward.

"Wheel her while I take a squint through the glass. I think I sighted the shoreline. About time, too. It's starting to snow. I want to pick up a bearing. With the leeway we've been making, we're probably pretty well south of Berglund's." The wind-driven particles of flinty snow stung Shane's cheek and bared hands like hot needle points, and formed swift-moving white lines before the glass that all but obliterated the distant shoreline. "Haul her into the wind a bit," Shane ordered. "I can't tell where we are, yet, but we don't want to run close enough in to hang up on a reef—or we sure will spend the winter with the fish. Hold her nor'nor'east till I can pick up a landmark." Twenty minutes later he called again, "Swing her due north. There's the rock-pile. We're about six miles south of Berglund's. It won't be long, now. An hour ought to put us at Berglund's dock. And I won't be sorry to get there. This storm's picking up."

AS HE stood, glass in hand, watching the shore through the snow, Shane wondered whether Louise Beatty would be at the post. She had told him a few weeks before that her father would be going to Berglund's during the last week in November for his winter supplies, and that she would accompany him—and this

was the last day of the last week in November. He hoped she would be there. His pulse quickened at thought of the girl with the laughing brown eyes, the raven hair, and full red lips, and his heart warmed within him as he pictured her seated opposite him across the table in his tiny cabin. Another season like this one and I can ask her—I can build a kitchen on the back—I can buy that hull from Cap Jones for eight hundred, and put in a new motor. I'm out of debt now, and with two outfits going— If I could add a boat each year I'd soon have a fleet—then we could live in Winnipeg or Montreal, or Ottawa in the winter. Damn Berglund! If I could have run to Riverton before the freeze-up, I could have bought that hull this fall——

Thought of the Berglunds brought a frown to the clean-cut, weather-tanned face—Torg, the elder of the two, with his pale blue eyes that gleamed cold and hard as diamonds above the high cheek bones of his thin, saturnine face; and Sven, with his baby-blue eyes, his round apple-cheeked face, and receding chin. "They'll never get her, damn 'em—she wouldn't have either one of 'em—with all their money," he muttered, savagely.

Sleepy Joe called from the wheel. "I'm t'ink mebbe-so we got good tam, tonight, eh?"

"How's that?"

"Berglun's mak' de dance tonight—las' night Novembaire. Dey have it een de new fur lof'—before she git stink oop wit' fur."

"That's right. I'd plumb forgot about the dance. Well, we'll be there."

The breed pressed his face close to the glass. "You kin see?" asked. "Me, I'm kin see nuttin'—too mooch git dark, too mooch damn snow."

"I've got an eye out ahead. Hold her on her course till we pick up Berglund's light."

"Be plent' Injun girl com' down de riv' for dance. Berglun' got beeg jug, w'at you call de halc'hol, for pour een de wataire to mak' de wheesky."

"They better be careful how they sell their damn hooch to those Injuns—especially the girls. As long as Brink was the only policeman on the job around here, they could get away with anything. But Corporal Downey's stationed at Norway House now—and believe me, he don't fool! He's hard-boiled. Damn near killed me, setting my leg when I broke it a year ago over at Gypsomville. Did as good a job as any doctor could have done, too."

"Me, I'm lak good beeg drink hooch, right now," Sleepy Joe replied. "Ma han's col', an' ma feet. De hooch warm de belly, an' pret' queek git all warm, an' den kin dance all night, an' sing de song, an' holler lak hell for mak' de good tam."

"Yes, retorted Shane, "and then hang around Berglund's drunk as a boiled owl for a week, when I need you to help pull this boat out of the water. Listen, Joe—I'll give you five dollars, over and above your wages, if you'll stay sober till I get the boat out. If this weather holds, the lake's apt to freeze as soon as the wind goes down. Tomorrow we've got to unload the fish, and run the boat home. We'll rig a windlass, and get a couple of more men, and do the job in three days. If that little harbor at my camp freezes over before I get her in, I'd have to run her back to Berglund's and haul her out there—and then walk the three miles back and forth every day, all winter to work on her."

"*Oui,* you gimme fi' dollars, I'm stay sober lak hell."

"If I'd give you five dollars—like hell you'd stay sober, you mean," grinned Shane. "Berglunds would have the five

dollars before morning, and you'd be plastered to the guards. You don't draw a nickel till the boat's out of the water and blocked up for the winter. Then I'll pay you your wages, and if you've stayed on the job, I'll give you the extra five. There's Berglund's light! Just picked it up with the glass. You'll be able to see it in a few minutes. Then hold the light in line with the north end of the little rocky island. You know the channel—it hugs in close to the island. I'll stay out here with the glass in case your window ices up, or the snow thickens."

"I see de light, now—an' de islan'," Joe replied, his face close to the glass. "But ba Goss, eef de snow git mor' bad, I'm ain' see nuttin'!"

"Okay—ease her off a point or two and hold her. You're all right, Joe—couldn't do it better, myself. Watch your leeway!"

THE staunch little cabin boat, wallowing and bucking in the huge waves, forged ahead with the light showing just off the end of the tiny rock island that marked the termination of a rock reef, whose jagged, saw-toothed ridge was barely awash. Red Shane's lips tightened at thought of what would happen should the boat strike that reef on a night like this. What with the pounding of the waves, she'd be kindling wood in ten minutes. They were approaching the rocks, a quarter of a mile beyond which lay Berglund's Post.

Suddenly every muscle in Shane's body drew taut, and bracing himself, he held the glass on the light. It was moving! The bright white light, that was Berglund's gasoline lamp in the trading room, was moving—now this way, now that! The next instant a loud cry escaped him as the long line of white breakers that marked the crest of the sunken rock ridge burst into view directly in front—and only a few yards away! "Haul to port!" he yelled. "Quick! Heel her! Heel her to port!"

The little vessel shuddered as her blunt bow came around into the battering waves, hesitated, hung for what seemed to Red Shane an eternity with the frothing combers almost under his feet, then slowly she drew away, pitching and tossing, with the waves pounding her larboard bow.

"W'at de hell?" cried Sleepy Joe, when the combers were no longer a menace. "I'm hol' her right lak' you say! De light is right pas' de nort' end of islan'!"

"That's right, Joe. You were on the course as I laid her out to you. I've been checking you with the glass every minute. There's something wrong—something screwy, somewhere. Berglund's light was moving!"

"*Oui,* I'm see dat, but I'm t'ink dat ma eyes, or mebbe-so, de boat she jomp roun' een de wave." He paused and a grin twisted his lips. "Dat mus' be hell of a win', eh—to mak' de tradin' pos' jomp roun'?"

SHANE made his way forward to the wheel. "Here, let me take her. I can run her in from here, even if Berglund's light loops the loop. Look there!" he cried when, a few minutes later, the launch was chugging along in the quieter water beyond the reef. "There's no light in the trading room window, and someone's hurrying back to the post from that long rocky point with a gas lantern! Some damn cuss carried that light to the point to throw us off the course! And if he'd stood still with it for one more minute, instead of moving around, he'd have set us on the reef, for sure. I noticed that moving light just in time. Wait till I get my hands on the bird that pulled that stunt! It'll be a hell of a while before he'll try to throw anyone else off his course!"

The moving light disappeared behind a grove of spruce, and as the boat nosed into the mouth of the river and swung toward the dock, the light appeared in

the window, and the trading room door slammed. As Red helped Sleepy Joe make the boat fast, he was aware that someone was hurrying toward him along the wooden dock.

"Lou!" he cried, the grim set of his jaw giving way to a glad smile. "I was hoping you'd be here!"

"Oh, Red!" cried the girl, "I'm so glad you got in! Torg Berglund told me you'd probably be in today, and when that storm kicked up, I was worried! I borrowed Torg's glass, and I've watched for you all the afternoon. Then just as it was getting so dark and snowy I could hardly see, I picked you up. I ran clear down to the end of the point with the lantern, so you could see where you were."

"Good girl!" applauded Red, his eyes growing serious. "It sure helped a lot! But really, Lou—would you have cared—a lot—if—if I hadn't got in? If I'd—never got in off the lake?"

"Why, Red—if you—you hadn't come in, I'd—I don't know what I'd have done."

The next moment his arms were about her and she was struggling futilely, and altogether unconvincingly in his strong embrace, as words poured in a torrent from his lips: "—and just as soon as the ice will hold, we'll go down to Riverton and be married—and we'll build a kitchen onto the cabin—and I'll buy that hull from Cap Jones—and——"

"Don't, Red—let me go—someone will see us! There's lots of people here—for the dance tonight—Indians, and trappers—they're in the new fur loft getting it ready. They'll be coming out—and they'll see us!"

"I don't care if the whole world sees us! I'll never let you go till you say you'll marry me."

"Sure, I'll marry you, Red! Come on—let me go! I—I love you, Red—I've hoped you'd want me—ever since I've known you!"

"Give me a kiss to seal the bargain," insisted Red, holding her even closer, and smiling happily into the liquid eyes upturned to his.

THE bargain was sealed, in fact they were still sealing it when they were interrupted by the voice of Sleepy Joe, who was eyeing them with a broad grin.

"Dat light sure t'row you off you course, all right! I wondered w'at you goin' do w'en you git you han's on de dam' cuss dat tak' de light down on de point—an' ba Goss I fin' hout!"

Red turned to the breed with a grin. Reaching into his pocket, he tossed the man a bill. "Beat it!" he laughed. "There is the five I promised you, if you'd stay sober. Have a good time tonight—but if you're soused in the morning, I'll break you in two!"

The man disappeared in the direction of the trading room, chuckling, and the girl turned quickly to Red. "What did he mean—about the light throwing you off your course? And what did you threaten to do to the one who took the light to the point?"

Red dispersed the real concern in the girl's eyes with a laugh. "Don't pay any attention to Joe, sweetheart. He's just talking through his hat. It was a fine thing you did—to stand out there on the point, on a night like this, and hold that light for me to steer by. Your own idea, eh?"

"Well, I don't deserve all the credit, Red. It was really Torg Berglund who thought of the light. When I ran back there to the fur loft where they were getting ready for the dance, and told him I could see your boat 'way out in the lake, he went to the trading room and lighted the lantern. He said maybe a light on the point would help you get your bearings—so I took it and ran down there."

"I see," answered Red, turning his head to conceal the grim set of his face. "The only other light was in the new fur loft—with no windows on the lake side. That

was mighty thoughtful of Torg, wasn't it?"

"Yes. I've never liked him, but I suppose everyone has some good in them."

"Yeah—but sometimes it's hard to find."

"It was cold out there on the point—with the wind and the snow roaring about me.

"I had to walk up and down to keep warm. I was afraid to set the lantern on the slippery rocks for fear the wind would blow it into the lake, so I carried it in my hand. It didn't bother you any, did it, Red—to have the light moving that way?"

"Bother me!" cried the man, as thought of the vicious combers almost at his feet flashed into his brain. "Sweetheart, it saved my life—and the boat—and Sleepy Joe. When I saw that light move—I knew exactly where I was!"

Chapter II

BERGLUND'S POST

THE dance at Berglund's was well attended by the Indians from the village up the river, and the trappers from scattered camps. No policeman appeared to put a damper on the festivity. Alcohol, abundantly watered for the Indians, and less so for the whites, was served at two-bits the drink, and as the liquor took hold, the dance waxed fast and hilarious.

Red Shane danced with the Indian girls, and the wives and daughters of the few white trappers, but mostly with Louise Beatty—a fact that brought scowls of anger to Sven Berglund's chubby face, and caused Torg's pale eyes to gleam balefully.

During a lull, in which fiddlers and dancers crowded the rude bar that had been erected at one end of the loft, Red slipped into his sheep-lined coat and donned cap and gloves. As he passed Louise, who was seated on a bench talking with an old Indian woman, she stopped him.

"Where are you going, Red?"

"Just going to step out and see that the boat's all right. She may have slipped a line and be chaffing against the dock. You see," he added with a grin, "I had something else to think about while Joe was making her fast, and I want to see what kind of a job he did."

"Wait till I get my capote, and I'll go with you. A breath of fresh air will do me good."

She joined him a moment later, and they stepped from the room into a raging blizzard. As they rounded the corner of the trading room they were buffeted by a wind eddy that all but took their breath away. They proceeded along the wall of the long log building through an alley swept completely bare of snow and flanked by a drift already shoulder deep. Wallowing through a few lesser drifts the two reached the dock to find the sturdy boat snuggly moored.

"We'll step into the cabin a minute and catch our breath," Red said. "Here, give me your hand. The deck's sheeted with ice."

Seated upon a low locker that ran the length of the cabin, the girl glanced about her, as Red turned on a tiny battery bulb above the motor. "It's such a little boat, Red—and the lake's so big! Why, out there when I first saw you through the glass, I wasn't sure it was a boat—it would go clear out of sight between the waves. Two or three times I thought it had gone under."

"No danger of that, sweetheart," laughed the man. "She's plenty big enough to stand anything this lake can kick up—if I keep her off the rocks. Thirty-eight feet, over all—and twelve

feet in the beam. Give me plenty of water under her keel—and let her blow!"

"Did you make a good catch?"

"Brought in two tons—that's what Berglund wanted. He's paying me twenty cents, in the round. Eight hundred dollars for this lift—enough to buy that hull of Cap Jones. When are we going to get married?"

THE dark eyes were serious, and little wrinkles of perplexity appeared between the brows. "I don't know, Red. That's what we've got to think about."

"What do you mean—think about? Listen, Lou—I'm not a kid—I'm darn near twenty-three years old. It's time I was getting married—if I'm ever going to. The girl giggled, and Red frowned at the interruption. "What I mean is, there's no use putting it off till we both get old. We love each other, and that's all there is to it."

"But—"

"How old are you?" interrupted Red.

"I'm nineteen."

"Yeah—and next year you'll be twenty!" the tone was an accusation. "If we don't get married pretty quick we'll be so old we won't care whether we're married, or not!

"Listen—I can make money. I've got this outfit just about paid for in the two years I've been at it—and the first year I didn't know a whitefish from a sucker—and I'd never been on a fish boat. Dad and mother died with the flu the year after I got out of high school. I heard about this outfit for sale, and I took what little money dad left, and went to the bank and told 'em I wanted to borrow enough more to buy it. I'd done pretty well in school, and played hockey on the team, and the banker had known dad, and all—so he lent me the money without batting an eye. I know the game now—and I can keep on making more money. I'm going to keep adding a boat each year till I've got the biggest outfit on the lake. It won't be long before we can quit living in a cabin here in the bush—"

"But, Red, I love the bush! I hated every minute of the three years I stayed in school at the convent. They wanted me to keep on—but I was too homesick for the bush."

"So do I love it—and the lake, too!" exclaimed Red. "We'll stay in the bush then. I hate cities. Only we won't have to live in a one-room cabin. We'll keep our eyes open and pick out the spot we want, and then we'll build a big log house—"

"Oh, won't it be just grand!" cried the girl, her eyes shining. "And we'll have Indians to work for us. And have good canoes, and maybe a fast launch, and the best dogs in the country!"

"You bet we will! But there'll be a few years yet, that we'll have to get along with my cabin. We'll build on a kitchen, so the room won't smell like cooking all the time."

"I don't care how long we have to live in the cabin!" cried the girl. "I'll love it—and we'll plan and plan—so we'll know just what kind of a big house we want, when we're ready to build it."

"Sure we will. When are we going to get married? I can get Sleepy Joe and some Indians to help build the kitchen, just as soon as we get the boat out of the water."

"But—what about dad?" again the little wrinkles appeared between the arched eyebrows.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm kind of worried about him. You see, when I got back from the convent, last year, the Berglunds had bought this post from McTavish. They've been here three years and, up to the time I got back, things were about the same as when I left. Dad was trapping in the winter, and working at Norway House, sometimes for the Hudson's Bay Company, and sometimes for the French Company, and doing well enough. He was content with a reason-

able amount of debt to carry him through the season—and always paid it before the next season's debt.

"BUT somehow after I came home, he's let the Berglunds talk him into buying a lot more stuff than he needs—and they give him debt for it. Last summer, he worked for them, here at the post, instead of going to Norway House—and they give him lots to drink, and tell him to never mind about being in a hurry to pay off his debt—until I'm afraid he owes them more than he can pay. And on top of that, this trip he's bought a lot more stuff. Some of it he doesn't need at all—a brand new Peterboro canoe, and new blankets, and even a lot of heavy woven wire for a dog corral! We never had a dog corral—and we don't need one. And he bought me new clothes I don't need, and new clothes for himself, when his old ones were still perfectly good. I'm sure I don't know what he's thinking of—how he ever expects to pay for it all. He can't go on just piling up debt. The Berglunds are going to call a halt sometime."

Red grinned broadly. "You bet they are! And I can tell you exactly when it will be."

"When?" asked the girl, her eyes widening in surprise.

"Just the minute word reaches them that you and I are married! Don't you see through their game?"

"No—what game?"

"They both want to marry you, don't they?"

"Yes—both of them have asked me several times to marry them—but so have lots of other men—Constable Brink, and Billy Keeler, the French Company clerk, and Francois Beaulieu. But I wouldn't marry any of them—a Berglund least of all. I hate Torg—he's—oh, I don't know—kind of slimy looking, and Sven is just plain dumb."

"They're both dumb enough to think that if they get old Tom deep enough in debt, he'll make you marry one of 'em to get him out. Hasn't he ever said anything about your marrying one of the Berglunds?"

"Well—he has hinted, now and then, that they'd be a pretty good catch for some girl. He says they're rich—lots of money, and a good trading outfit. But—dad would never make me marry one of them! Why—it would be like—selling me!"

"You bet he won't!" Red exclaimed. "Because we'll get married before he has the chance! How long have you been here, this trip?"

"WE CAME three days ago. Sailed up along the shore. But how we're going to get back is more than I know. The boat will be loaded to the gunnels with all the stuff dad's bought—and you know how quick the wind can pick up, this time of year. Even if we got a fair wind, after this storm lets up, it could turn into a gale in half an hour."

"Sure, and with that old sailboat loggy as she'd be, you'd swamp in ten minutes. You're not going back in that boat! I'll run you down there tomorrow, after we get the fish unloaded. We can tow the sailboat."

"But I thought you wanted to get your boat out of the water before the freeze-up. We could borrow Berglunds' dogs, and—"

"And make about four trips through this new snow," grinned Red, "with all the stuff old Tom's bought. Nothing doing. It's only about forty miles to the mouth of the Poplar, and I can run you down there in five hours easy. Where have you been staying since you came here?"

"All the women have been sleeping in the new fur loft, and the men sleep in the storeroom. I'll be glad to get dad back home. The Berglunds keep him about half drunk, and when he's that way they can sell him anything."

"Don't you worry about what they sell him. It's their own fault if they find themselves left holding the bag when they try to collect."

He reached out, drew her close, and planted a kiss on her upturned lips. "And they're going to be plenty mad when they find their scheme didn't work. Come on, we'd better be getting back to the dance. You're not going to get much sleep tonight. It won't bust up till daylight."

THAT their quarter-hour absence from the dance had not passed unnoticed by the Berglunds was evidenced by Sven's round-faced scowls, and the fact that several times during the night, Red was aware that Torg's cold blue eyes were regarding him with a sinister glare. He wondered whether Sleepy Joe, his tongue loosened by alcohol, had told what he had seen on the dock when the boat came in. "The Berglunds might as well find out, now as later, just where they stand with Lou," he muttered to himself, as the dance broke up. "If Joe spilled what he knows," he added with a grin, "they'll probably take back all that stuff they sold old Tom this trip—and we won't have much of a load to take down to the Poplar."

Much to Red's surprise, despite the fact that Sleepy Joe had money in his pocket, he remained sober enough to help with the unloading and weighing of the fish. Leaving the half-breed on the dock to help Tom Beatty stow his supplies, and make the sailboat fast for the tow, Red accompanied Torg Berglund to the trading room where the man totalled the weigh slips.

"Forty-two hundred an' sixteen pounds, at twenty cents, is eight, forty-three, twenty. An' here's yer money," the man added, producing a huge roll of bills from the safe and counting it out. As Red pocketed the bills, the trader continued. "Sleepy Joe tells me yer figgerin' on overhaulin' yer outfit this winter. The narrows is froze by now, so you can't run down to Riverton, but we've got everythin' here you'll need in the way of lead, an' oakum, an' lumber, an' paint, an' twine. The stuff'll run you a little higher'n Riverton, on account of the freight. But it's the best you kin do. Norway House'll be froz in, too."

"Yeah," Red agreed, "I expect it will. I'll be seein' you tomorrow. I'll be wanting some nails, and spikes, and flooring, and a roll or two of roofing, and some two-by-fours, and rough lumber for a roof. I'm buildin' a kitchen onto my cabin. I've got to go now—promised to run old Tom Beatty down to the Poplar. The storm's letting up, but it wouldn't be safe for him to make the run in that old sailboat, what with the load he's got—both inside an' out."

"What do you mean?" asked Berglund. "Tom ain't drunk — an' he ain't been drunk around here. He could make the trip all right, the way the wind is."

"Yeah, but where would he be if the wind swung around—and the two of 'em in that loggy sailboat? I'll run 'em down, and lay up tonight in the mouth of the Poplar, and be back here before noon tomorrow."

"Cold as it is, if the wind goes down, yer liable to get froze in down there."

"I could think of a lot worse places to get froze in for the winter," Red retorted, with a grin, as he stepped past Sven who was entering the room.

PROCEEDING to the dock, he found that with the help of Sleepy Joe, old Tom had got his supplies aboard, and the sailboat made fast. The breed unscrewed a cap set in the forward deck and sounded the tank with a stick.

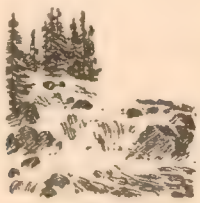
"Mus' git gas," he announced. "De tank she 'bout hempty."

Red retraced his steps, and finding no one in the trading room, stepped toward the door of the storeroom which was open. He paused at the sound of voices.

"I got a good notion to go down to the dock an' take that stuff away from Tom

Beatty," Sven said, a note of anger in his voice. "He already owes us more'n he kin pay. When I told you to go ahead an' load him up with debt, an' I'd pay it, if he couldn't, I figgered that he'd talk Louise into marryin' me. I as good as told him that, if she would, I'd call the debt square. But now it looks like that damn Red Shane might git her. Now he's runnin' 'em back to the Poplar in his fish boat."

Torg's voice sounded cold. "Leave the stuff where it is. Yer a damn fool to think Louise would marry a dumb guy like you. You don't know nothin' but baseball, an' that don't do you no good up here. I give old Tom that debt 'cause he's goin' to talk the girl into marryin' *me*—not 'cause you told me to."



"Marry you!" Sven laughed nastily. "You're the one that's the damn fool, if you think she's even look twict at an old cuss like you. You better pick you out a squaw, if you want to git married. No white woman could set acrost a table from them eyes of yourn without goin' nuts. Pale an' cold as chunks of ice—it gives me the creeps, jest to look at 'em."

"Yeah? Well, mebbe they've got good reason to give you the creeps." Torg Berglund's voice ran hard as chilled steel. "Where'd you be right now, if they hadn't seen the chanct to make us a stake? You'd be back in Osakis, pitchin' baseball fer fifty dollars a month—that's where you'd be!"

"Yah—an' I wisht to God I was there! I wisht I'd never let you talk me into throwin' in with you, an' yer damn—"

"Shut up!"

"I didn't say nothin'," replied Sven, a note of fear in his voice.

"You string along with me, an' you'll be all right," Torg continued. "But don't go shootin' off yer mouth, if you want to stay healthy. An' you kin git that notion of marryin' old Tom's girl out of yer head, too. She'll be marryin' me, come spring. An' if Red Shane stands in the road, it'll be jest too damn bad fer him—that's all! There's plenty accidents kin happen to a man on the lake, er in the bush."

Red retraced his steps quietly to the outside door, which he banged loudly, then stamping noisily into the room called, "Hey, Berglund, I've got to have some gas!"

Torg stepped from the storeroom. "How much you want?"

"One of those thirty-gallon drums'll be enough. You needn't bother to come down to the dock. Joe an' I can handle it. How much is it?"

"I got to look up the invoice. Pay me when you git yer other stuff."

"Okay. See you tomorrow." Red left the room, banging the door behind him.

Chapter III

Red Makes a Threat

THE forty-mile run to the mouth of the Poplar was uneventful. The supplies were cached to be relayed by dog sled to the Beatty cabin, some three or four miles up the river. Red accepted old Tom's profuse thanks, and as the girl paused at the edge of the bush to wave good-bye he called to her:

"I'll be down when I get the boat hauled out, and the kitchen built! The lake'll be frozen then—and I can make the run in a day with my dogs."

"I'll be waiting!" she cried, and turning, followed her father up the trail.

As Red stepped from his boat onto the Berglund dock just before noon on the following day, a trapper paused in his work of repairing a sled and beckoned with a jerk of his head. Leaving Sleepy

Joe to make her fast, Red sauntered over to the man.

"What's on your mind, Pete?" he asked.

The man tore the corner from a plug of tobacco and stepped close. "Listen, Red," he began, after a moment of awkward hesitation. "I ain't no hand to go buttin' into somethin' which it ain't none of my business. But the facts is, I an' the old woman was talkin' it over, this mornin', an' she claims I ought to tell you, so you could shet Sven Berglund's dirty mouth."

"What do you mean?" asked Red, his brow drawing into a frown. "What does she want you to tell me?"

The trapper mouthed his quid and spat largely into the new snow. "Well, las' night there was a bunch of us in the tradin' room, sort of chawin' the fat back an' forth, like folks does, an' the jug was passin' around, an' Sven he was hittin' it pretty regular. It wasn't long before he begun passin' remarks about you an' Tom Beatty's gal, slippin' off from the dance t'other night. Torg, he told him a time er two to dry up—but before he finally got him shet off, he's said a plenty. There was half a dozen white folks there, an' o' course we didn't pay no heed to nothin' Sven said. But there was a bunch of them young squaws an' bucks from the village, an' they was takin' it all in, an' I seen 'em nudgin' one another an' snickerin'. Me an' the old woman has know'd Louise Beatty ever since she was borned, you might say, an' there ain't no finer gal than her ever lived. Her ma was a fine woman, too—an' Tom's as good a man as there is in the bush, barrin' him drinkin' a little too much now an' then. But like the old woman says, it ain't no good fer a white gal to get a reputation like that amongst the Injuns—an' if Sven keeps on spreadin' his dirty talk around, some folks that don't know her as good as we do, might get to thinkin' there might be somethin' to it." He paused as he noted that Red's gloved fists had clenched, and his glance sought the harrowed blue eyes. "I don't want you should think hard of me fer tellin' you, Red," he added hastily. "It was the old woman's idee. She figgered you ought to know."

"Your wife's dead right, Pete. I ought to know," Red answered in a hard, brittle voice. "And I'm obliged to you for telling me." Turning abruptly, he strode from the dock, the trapper and Sleepy Joe following at a respectful distance.

THERE were a dozen people in the trading room when Red entered, some idly loafing, and others leisurely selecting odds and ends to add to their winter outfit of supplies. Giving them scarcely a glance, Red faced Torg Berglund across the counter upon which he had just unrolled a couple of laps from a bolt of red cloth for the inspection of a young squaw.

"Where's Sven?" the words cut sharp like the crack of a dog whip, and all eyes turned on the speaker.

Torg met the blazing eyes with a fishy stare. "He ain't here," he answered. "He pulled out at daylight with an' outfit of goods for Moose Lake. You want to see him?"

"I'll kill him, if I get my hands on him," Red replied in a dry, hard voice. "And I'd hate to swing for killing a damn skunk like him! I heard what he said last night—in here. And the next time I lay eyes on him, by God, he'll eat those words—or else! You tell him that, Berglund. Tell him if he wants to live happy, he'd better cut a wide circle around me—wherever I am. You get that, do you?"

The trader's expression did not change by so much as the flicker of an eyelash. "Yeah—I'll tell him," he replied, in a flat voice.

"And the same thing goes for you, too, Berglund. You're two of a kind—a snake and a skunk. That may not make sense—but it puts the idea across. How much was that gas I got here, yesterday? When I pay you for that, I'm through with you."

"Thirty gallon—forty-eight cents a gallon—fourteen-forty," the man replied in the same toneless voice. Apparently he had taken no offense at the insult hurled at him by the irate Red, who counted out the money and tossed it onto the counter. "How about the nails, an' the lumber, an' roofin' you said you'd be needin'?" he asked.

"I'll get what I need at Norway House."

"Norway House is a hundred mile."

"I'd get it there, if it was two hundred," retorted Red. "I'll have a good trail when the lake freezes."

"I tried to make Sven shut his head las' night," retorted the other. "You kin ask these folks."

"Sure—because you thought you'd lose my trade. Tell me this, Berglund—why was Louise Beatty down there on the end of the point with a light when I was comin' in off the lake just after dark, on the night of the dance?"

"Why—because. She took my glass an' was lookin' fer you, off an' on, all the afternoon. Then along about dark she come bustin' into the loft where we was gittin' fixed up fer the dance, an' she says she sighted you, out in the lake, so I come in here an' lit the lantern—we was usin' the big lamp in the fur loft. I went back to the loft an' she musta carried the lantern out on the point."

"Why?"

"I s'pose she figgered you could see it better out there."

"Why did she think that?"

"Why—damn if I know."

"You lie! She thought I could see the light better from there, because you told her I could! You knew damn well I'd think that light was here in the trading room window—where it always is. And you knew I'd hold my course by keeping that light just off the north end of the island—you showed me the course, yourself, two years ago. And you knew that if I lined the north end of the island with a light on the end of the point, it would put me on the reef—and with a norther blowing like it was that night, and the air full of snow, I wouldn't have a chance in a thousand to discover my mistake till it was too late. You wanted to get rid of me, Berglund—and you came within less than a boat-length of doing it. You figured that if I was out of the way, Louise Beatty would marry you. You're a fool, Berglund. She wouldn't have you if you were the last man alive. It was a pretty slick scheme, Berglund — only it didn't work. No one would have suspected you of murder. It would have just been one of those accidents that happen to men in storms on a lake. I've had my say, Berglund—now just you open your mouth to deny it, and I'll be over that counter so damn quick it'll make your head swim!"

No one moved, and for the full minute during which the two stood facing each other across the counter, Torg Berglund's face never moved a muscle, nor did his cold, fishy eyes for a moment leave Red's face. The silence became tense—almost painful. Then Red Shane turned abruptly upon his heel and strode from the room.

Chapter IV

MURDER

IT TOOK two days, with the help of Sleepy Joe and a couple of Indians who lived nearby, for Red Shane to haul his boat from the water by means of a Spanish windlass, a pair of long skids, and some rollers, and block her up for the winter on the shore of the little natural harbor where he had built his cabin, some three miles north of Berglund's Post.

When the job was finished Red paid off the Indians and turned to the breed. "You've got fifty dollars coming for your last month's work, Joe," he said. "You did better than I expected when you stayed sober enough to haul the boat out. I'm not paying you your money now, because I've got a job I want you to do—

and if I paid you, you'd hang around Berglund's till you drank it all up. Go up to the Indian village and get my dogs. Jack Pigeon summered 'em for me. Then you hire three more dog outfits, and two drivers—you can drive one of the teams—and come back here. We're going to Norway House for my winter supplies, and the material to build a kitchen on my cabin here. The lake will be frozen by the time we start back, and I figure we can haul all the stuff with four big loads. You savvy all that?"

"*Oui,* I'm savvy all right. Berglund's goin' be mad lak hell w'en he fin' out you buy de stuff at Norway House."

"To hell with the Berglunds! I'm through with 'em. I'd go to Winnipeg for my stuff, before I'd trade with Berglunds."

Sleepy Joe removed his cap and then scratched his head. "Better you look hout for Berglun'," he warned, a troubled look in his eye. "He no fight lak' man—he, mebbe-so, lay een de bush—tak' shot at you, w'en you no look—mebbe-so com' een de night, set de cabin on fire."

"I'm not afraid of the Berglunds—either one of 'em. They know I'm onto 'em, and they'll damn well leave me alone. Get going now. Here's another five dollars. That won't last you more than two or three days at Berglund's. Then you go on to the village and be back here with those teams in a week or ten days. In the meantime, I'll get out the logs for the kitchen. You're lucky this winter—I can use you for a couple of months, what with building the kitchen and overhauling the boat."

"*Oui,* I lak' work for you. Mebbe-so I'm hang roun' Berglun' two, t'ree day. I'm mak' um t'ink I'm git droonk. Tell 'em you goin' trade Norway House—mebbe-so kin fin' out w'at dey say 'bout dat."

Red grinned. "I guess you won't have much trouble making 'em think you're drunk, if you hang around there two, three days lapping up that hooch of theirs. Just don't get so paralyzed you forget to go on to the village, that's all."

IN THE afternoon of the second day after the departure from Red's cabin, Sven Berglund returned from his trip to Moose Lake. As he beat a heavy powdering of snow from his clothing, he glanced with a frown at Sleepy Joe stretched out on a pile of robes behind the stove.

"You hadn't ought to let 'em hang around here, stewed like that," Sven Berglund warned. "S'pose one of the Mounted would pop in on us? Constable Brink's all right—but they say this Corporal Downey that's in command at Norway House now is plenty tough. They claim he's hell on wheels, when it comes to sellin' liquor to the Injuns."

"Always afraid of somethin', ain't you?" taunted Torg. "If you'd use yer head, you'd know there ain't no corporal goin' to make a two, three hundred mile patrol through loose snow, when he kin make a constable do it fer him. Joe, there, he'll be pullin' out in the mornin' fer the village to git Shane's dogs that Jack Pigeon's be'n summerin' fer him. An' speakin' of Shane reminds me that before you unhitch yer dogs you better slip over to his place with ten pound of oakum, an' fifty pound of lead, an' five gallon of paint. He's got his boat hauled out, an' he wants to git to work on it."

Sven frowned. "It's snowin' like hell," he grumbled. "Why didn't Shane load the stuff on his boat? He stopped in here when he come back from Beatty's, didn't he?"

"No," lied Torg, "he couldn't git in. There was a skimmin' of ice inside the reef. He sent word by Joe that he needed the stuff bad, an' he didn't have his dogs, an' would we mind haulin' it over there fer him. I wouldn't bother, if that's all there was of it—but he's goin' to be a good customer, this winter, what with building him a kitchen an' all. He'll need quite a bit of stuff."

"Yeah — buildin' a kitchen, so Louise Beatty'll have a nice place to cook when she marries him, eh?" sneered Sven.

"Louise Beatty'll be marryin' me, when the time comes," announced Torg, ignoring the jibe. "An' when you see Shane, you better collect fer them thirty gallon of gas he got to take the Beattys down on."

Sleepy Joe stirred uneasily on his hard couch as Sven stamped from the room, banging the door behind him.

IN a thick grove of spruce near his cabin, Red Shane was getting out good straight logs for his kitchen. Snow was falling thickly, and each blow of his axe brought a shower of it about his head and shoulders. He paused to beat the snow from his cap and tighten the muffler about his neck, smiling to himself as he pictured Louise moving happily about from stove to table in her new kitchen. "I'll get a phonograph," he mused, and then in the long winter evenings we can—" His reverie was cut short by the sharp crack of a rifle, and the smile on his lips changed quickly to a frown. "Someone's got their nerve, hunting moose right at my door!" he muttered, as he hastened toward the edge of the thicket. "I'll bet they knocked off that young bull I've been saving for my own winter's meat. No Indian would do a trick like that. If it's one of those damn Berglunds I'll—"

He halted abruptly on the edge of the thick copse, and stared at a six-dog team that was pulling a sled toward his cabin, not more than fifty yards distant. But there was no one with the sled! Red recognized the Berglund dogs, as his glance swept beyond them to scrutinize the trail from Berglund's Post which wound among the outcropping rocks of a small sparsely timbered prairie. The falling snow foreshortened visibility to a scant hundred yards. His gaze focused on a dark object, and his eyes widened in horror as he realized that the object was the body of a man—lying there, sprawled grotesquely in the snow. Swiftly his eyes swept the landscape. Berglund's dogs had stopped beside the cabin, and were looking about, undecided. There was no other sign of life. The man in the snow did not move. Had he met with an accident—been shot with his own rifle? Red covered the intervening distance, sinking deeply into the soft snow. He saw at a glance that the man was Sven Berglund, and that blood still flowed from a gaping hole in his upturned forehead to form a crimson slush in the snow. He was unarmed—and again Red's glance swept the foreshortened horizon. The thought struck him with the force of a blow—Sven Berglund had been murdered! And murdered within fifty yards of his, Red's own cabin! Not one chance in a million of its being an accidental killing — that Berglund had been struck by a stray bullet from a hunting rifle. That rifle shot had been fired at too close range for that. It had been fired with murderous intent. But—by whom? A name leaped into his brain—the name of Torg Berglund! He remembered hearing the two brothers quarreling in the storeroom over Louise Beatty — remembered the note of fear in Sven's voice—and remembered Torg's closing words: "She'll be marryin' me, come spring. An' if Red Shane stands in the road, it'll be jest too damn bad for him—that's all."

TORG had tried to get him once—when he had sent Louise to the point with the light. But would a man deliberately murder his own brother, even though he

considered him a serious rival for the hand of the woman he wanted to marry? He pictured Torg's pale, cold eyes—and with a sickening sensation came the recollection of his own threat against Sven—delivered there in the trading room, with a dozen or more witnesses to hear it. The whole diabolical scheme flashed into Red's brain as he stood, his eyes on the lifeless body at his feet that the fast-falling snow had already powdered with white. Torg had not told Sven of the threat against him—had sent him here on some pretext or other, and had followed, and shot him—knowing full well that the crime would be laid at Red's door—what with all those witnesses to swear that they heard his angry threat to kill Sven. Red's brain went numb with the realization that he hadn't a chance in the world of proving that he didn't kill Sven, as he had threatened to. Why, he knew that Torg's rifle was even the same calibre as his own!

Slowly, as one in a dream, Red turned from the body and walked to his cabin, following the trail of the dog sled, already almost obliterated by the wind-driven snow. The dogs had settled onto their bellies and Red noted the contents of the sled—a keg of lead, a bundle of oakum, and several cans of paint, with Sven's rifle in its canvas covering slipped beneath the lashing. Evidently Sven had anticipated no trouble, or he would have carried his rifle in his hands.

RED reached for the snowshoes that hung from a peg driven into the wall beside the door. Whoever had shot Sven must have fired at close range, for the sound of the shot had been loud, and the thickly falling snow would have rendered a long shot impossible. Returning to the body, Red glanced about him, then headed toward a small thicket of stunted spruce trees at the end of a low rock ridge that jutted out into the little prairie. Whoever had fired the shot would be gone—but he must have left tracks that might still be visible despite the rapidly drifting snow. Passing around behind the thicket, his eyes caught two narrow parallel lines, only faintly visible through the eddying ground drift—the tracks of a pair of skis! Red knew that there were only two pairs of skis in the country — one of them was strapped to the dead man's feet, out there in the snow—and the other belonged to Torg.

Mechanically he began to follow the tracks, but gave it up shortly and returned to the cabin. The trail was all but obliterated, and there was no point in following it to the Berglund post. He had found out what he wanted to know—that Torg Berglund had stood behind that thicket at the time Sven was shot. He'd throw a pack onto Sven's sled, hit out for Norway House, and report the matter to Corporal Downey!

Loosening the lashing, he unloaded the sled, carrying Sven's rifle into the cabin, and tossing the other stuff into the snow. Hastily he made up a trail pack—blankets, a change of clothing, food for four or five days. By the time the load was in place on the sled, the early darkness had already set in. It had almost stopped snowing, but the wind held steady, and there was no break in the heavy blanket of clouds. In an hour it would be pitch-black. Realizing that he could only make three or four miles before he would be forced to camp, Red unharnessed and toggled the dogs, and fed them. He decided to wait until morning.

CHAPTER V

CONSTABLE BRINK MAKES AN ARREST

HE prepared his supper, and had just seated himself at the table when the door burst open and Constable Brink, of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, stepped into the room, a leveled revolver in his hand.

"You're under arrest, Shane—for the murder of Sven Berglund. It's my duty,

to tell you that anything you say may be used against you."

Red smiled. "All right, Brink. Come in and shut the door. You don't have to freeze a man, just because you're arresting him. Glad you happened along. You saved me a trip to Norway House."

"I'll make you a trip to Norway House, you mean," retorted the constable, shortly. "I'm takin' you in."

"Okay. Had supper?"

"No. I've been two hours getting here from Berglund's. Torg told me that Sven had left the post early in the afternoon to haul some supplies over here, and he was worried about him. Said he warned him not to go, as you'd threatened to kill him —but Sven said he wasn't afraid. He might better have heeded what Torg said, Shane. I found Sven's body just a few minutes ago — right where he dropped when you shot him."

"Not when I shot him, Brink. When Torg Berglund shot him."

"What!"

"You heard what I said. Better put up your gun and eat supper before it gets cold. I'm not going to resist you."

"Do you expect me to believe that Torg Berglund murdered his own brother?"

Red shrugged. "I don't know what you'll believe after you hear what I've got to say. I certainly didn't kill him. Someone did. I believe it was Torg."

"I'm hungry, all right," Brink said, "but I can't leave Sven's body out there in the snow for the wolves to eat. And I've got to unharness my dogs, too."

Red stood up. "I'll help you get Sven out of reach of the wolves," he said. "We can hoist him up onto the meat cache. I haven't killed my winter's meat yet. Then we can tend to your dogs. Wait a minute till I set this stuff back on the stove where it'll keep warm."

Brink hesitated a moment, then nodded, as he holstered his gun. "All right," he said, "but you stay ahead of me where I can keep an eye on you, an' don't you try any funny business — an' don't make a break to get away, or I'll get you, sure as hell."

"Okay," Red replied, as he removed the food from table to stove. "Come on—we'll finish our chores, and get to work on this grub. I'm hungry. Been chopping all day."

As Red preceded the officer out the door, he noted that it was no longer snowing, that the wind had risen, and great rifts appeared in the heavy cloud ceiling through which stars glittered brightly. As the two advanced toward the body, three gaunt shapes, silent as gray shadows, slithered across the prairie and disappeared into the scrub.

"Wolves," Red commented. "They're showing up early, this year."

"Yeah," Brink replied. "They're thick this fall. We get reports from all over the district. Some think that maybe the caribou are scarce, north of us—migration went some other way."

THE two carried the body to the meat cache, and after removing the skis, hoisted it to the platform by means of a rope and roller. They unharnessed and toggled Brink's dogs and fed them. As they were about to re-enter the cabin the officer pointed to the loaded sled. "Your outfit?" he asked.

Red nodded. "Yeah—my outfit—on Sven Berglund's sled. Those are Berglund's dogs, too."

"Where's yours?"

"Up to the Indian village near the head of the Big Black. Jack Pigeon summered 'em for me. Sleepy Joe's gone after 'em, and hasn't got back yet."

"So you were all set to make a get-away with Berglund's dogs an' sled, eh?"

"I was all set to hit out for Norway House to report the murder to Corporal Downey," Red replied.

"So, that's your story, eh? Where's the stuff you ordered to fix your boat with?"

"I didn't order anything."

"Torg said Sven had lead and paint and oakum for you."

Red pointed to the items. "There they lie—right where I shoved 'em off when I wanted to load my trail outfit. I didn't

take anything into the house, except Sven Berglund's rifle."

"His rifle! Oh, so you're goin' to claim you shot him in self-defense, eh?"

Red grinned. "I didn't shoot him. And whoever did, will have a hard time proving it was self-defense. Sven's rifle is buckled into its canvas cover. It was under the lashing of his load. He didn't even have it in his hands."

Brink frowned, and followed the other into the cabin where they removed mittens, caps and coats and the officer seated himself and watched Red's every move, as he carried the food from stove to table, and seated himself opposite.

When the meal was ended, both filled their pipes, and Brink eyed the other across the table. "It's a good thing I happened along when I did. If I hadn't, the chances are the wolves wouldn't have left enough of Sven by morning, to tell how he was killed."

"Maybe not."

"That's the way you wanted it to work out, ain't it?"

"To tell the truth, I never even thought of the wolves."

"Listen, Shane," said Brink, hunching himself forward, and resting his elbows on the table, "you might as well come clean. You're a fool if you think you're goin' to make anyone believe Torg Berglund murdered his own brother in cold blood. Torg told me about you threatenin' to kill Sven before a dozen or more witnesses—claimed he could give me the names of all of 'em. I suppose you deny makin' them threats, eh?"

"No, I guess I threatened to kill him, all right. I was mad clear through. I never meant to kill him. It was just a way of speaking.

"I did mean to beat him up, though—damn good and proper!"

"But, you admit you threatened to kill him?"

"I won't deny it. I don't remember exactly what I did say. I may have said I'd kill him."

"There'll be plenty others'll remember it—accordin' to Torg. I can check up on that, later. It's an open an' shut case, when I locate them witnesses. I'm goin' to take you on to Norway House, an' then come back an' line up my witnesses. This here makes two murder cases I'm on, an' believe me, I'm goin' to make good! I'll show Downey!"

"Two murders?"

"Yeah—that's how I come to get to Berglund's this afternoon. A trapper, name of Pierre Dufresne, over on the head of the Poplar, went crazy an' killed his Injun wife an' two kids with an axe, an' then took to the bush. Downey sent me to bring him in. Said he wished he had an older man for the detail. Sort of talked like he didn't think I could handle it, an' he was only detailin' me 'cause he didn't have no one else. But I'll show him. He'll know who he can send out, when I bring in two murderers, instead of one."

"Did you get Dufresne?"

"No—but I will. I trailed him down to the Big Black, an' then lost the trail in the storm, so I swung over to Berglunds. I'll take you in, an' then come back after Dufresne. I can round up them witnesses

the same trip—they're located along the Big Black, Torg says."

"And in the meanwhile you're leaving a crazy man loose in the country to murder someone else."

BRINK frowned. "Well, hell—I can't be in two places at once, can I? I've got to either let him go for a while, or you. An' you stand a better show of gettin' out of the country than he does. Besides—I've got you."

"I was going to head for Norway House, in the morning," reminded Red.

"Oh, yeah? Don't play me for a fool, Shane. A guy don't run to the police, when he's murdered a man. He runs away from 'em."

Red shrugged. "Have it your own way," he said, as he rose and began to pile the soiled dishes into the pan for washing.

Brink rose also, and allowed his glance to travel about the room. "That's Sven Berglund's rifle in the canvas case in the corner, I s'pose," he ventured, "an' this one would be yours?" He lifted a rifle from a couple of pegs driven into the log wall.

"That's right," agreed Red, pouring boiling water over the dishes.

Brink sniffed at the muzzle of the gun. "I s'pose you'll claim you ain't fired it lately."

"Not since noon," replied Red. "I took a shot at a wolf that was loping across the prairie."

"Hit him?"

"No."

"Had better luck when you shot at Sven, didn't you?"

"I didn't shoot at Sven. Listen, Brink—when you pulled out of Berglund's, didn't you see any other ski tracks than Sven's?"

"No, there wasn't none."

"Oh, yes there were—two sets. Torg's tracks — going, and coming. I found Torg's ski tracks, just after I found Sven's body. They're probably obliterated by now—they nearly were when I found them. But I can show you where Torg stood when he shot Sven."

"Yeah?" grinned the officer, "an' I can show you where you stood when you shot him, too. It was nearly dark when I found Sven's body, Shane, an' his trail was pretty near snowed under. But I could see your tracks yet, where you'd sunk deep into the snow—walkin' out to where he laid from the edge of that spruce grove where you fired the shot from. You should have wore snow-shoes, Shane. Then the tracks would have be'n shallow, an' would have drifted over. But a murderer always makes mistakes—if the police are smart enough to find 'em."

"I hope you're right. I know Corporal Downey. I believe he's smart enough to discover the murderer's mistakes—if he made any."

BRINK flushed angrily. "Oh, you do, eh? Well, this don't happen to be Downey's case—it's mine! An' I've already found the murderer's mistake—or one of 'em! You prob'ly made more that I'll find later. An' jest to save me a couple of long trips, an' a lot of time, I've thought of a plan. Torg Berglund'll be comin' here tomorrow. He said if I wasn't back there by noon, he'd come over here. I'll deputize him to take you to Norway House, an' I can keep on after Dufresne—an' round up them witnesses, to boot."

"Do you think Torg Berglund would take me to Norway House?" asked Red, eyeing the officer.

"Why, sure he would—if I deputized him. There ain't much doin' right now. He could lock up the post for a few days."

"I wasn't thinking about the post," Red retorted. "If Berglund started with me for Norway House, he'd be armed, wouldn't he?"

"Why, sure—he'd have his rifle."

"And I'd be handcuffed?"

"Of course."

"And he'd have the right to shoot me down, if I tried to escape?"

"Yes. He'd be responsible for your delivery."

"He'd never take me to Norway House alive," said Red, with conviction. "Tomorrow, or the day after, he'd shoot me in the back, and report to Downey that I'd tried to escape. He tried to kill me once—and he damn near got away with it."

"Tried to kill you! Why should he want to kill you?"

"To get me out of the way so he can force old Tom Beatty to make Louise marry him—after he gets Tom so deep in debt to him that there's no other way out. He'll have another reason, now — he knows damn well, that I know who murdered Sven. And he did it for the same reason he'd knock me off. Sven wanted to marry Louise, too. I happened to overhear the Berglunds quarreling over her, only a couple of days ago. Torg figured that by shooting Sven and getting me hanged for it, he'd be rid of both of us. But that wouldn't prevent him from making sure—if he got the chance to drill me."

"You claim he tried to murder you," said Brink skeptically. "What did he do —take a shot at you, and miss."

"No—he sent Louise down to the end of the point with a lantern when I was coming in after dark with the boat. He knew damn well I'd steer by the light, thinking it was in the trading room window—and I did. It was just by good luck, and the grace of God, that I didn't pile up on the reef."

"You're only guessin', Shane. An' if I was you, I'd leave Louise Beatty out of it. You've done her harm enough already."

"What do you mean?" asked Red, sharply.

"You know what I mean. Torg told me about you takin' her out the night of the dance. You ought to be ashamed—takin' advantage of a girl, like that—"

THE sentence was never finished. Red's fist shot out and caught Brink squarely on the chin with a blow that sent the officer staggering backward across the room, fumbling at his holster. Red leaped after him like a panther, striking again, as Brink brought up against the wall. The constable was no weakling. As his head cleared he lunged forward, abandoning for the moment the attempt to draw his gun, his arms closed about Red's body, pinioning one arm, and bringing both to the floor. Brink was on top, and as Red continued to hammer his head with short jabs of his free fist, the officer butted Red's face and chin with his head. Loosening his grip, he managed to draw his pistol from its holster just as Red grasped his wrist. Followed, then, several moments of frenzied straining, Brink to break Red's grasp on his wrist and bring the gun into play, Red striving to prevent it, by banging the back of the gun hand against the edge of the bunk. Then the gun thudded on the floor. Brink grunted with pain, and his hand relaxed as it came into contact with the point of a spike that protruded half an inch from the rude pole bunk. He shifted his weight, and instantly Red's knee shot upward and caught him in the groin, and Brink went limp as a rag.

Securing Brink's gun, Red thrust it into his pocket, rose to his feet, and stood for a moment regarding the man who lay curled like a boiled shrimp at his feet. Stooping, he lifted the officer to the bunk, searched his pockets for handcuffs and key, and deftly snapped the cuffs onto Brink's wrists, with the chain around a four-inch bunk stanchion. Then he went out, harnessed Berglund's dogs, and added Brink's supplies to those on Berglund's sled. A few minutes later he returned to the room, donned coat and mittens, secured his rifle and ammunition, and

turned to Brink, who was glaring at him from the bunk.

"It's your own fault, Brink," he said, "for believing what that foul mouthed Berglund told you about Louise and me. I had no intention of starting anything, till you brought her name into it. It was for that I made my foolish threat to kill Sven. As a matter of fact, I'd have used him pretty much as I've used you—taught him to keep his dirty mouth shut, and let it go at that. I told you the truth when I said I was going to hit out for Norway House in the morning. I've changed my mind, now. I can see that with you and Torg Berglund working against me—and those people who heard my threat against Sven — I wouldn't have a Chinaman's chance to escape the rope for that murder. As you said, you'd have an open and shut case, when you went to trial. But the case would never go to trial, Brink, because Torg Berglund would never take me to Norway House alive.

"It's tough, Brink. I've got a good thing here—and I'd have built it into a big business. I love the country, and the work—and I love Louise Beatty. If I thought I had a chance in the world, I'd stay and fight. Even yet I'll stay, if you'll give me your word you'll take me to Norway House yourself. I'll take a chance that Corporal Downey will get the real murderer. I don't want to hang for another man's crime. And I'll be damned if I'm going to be handcuffed and shot in the back by Torg Berglund."

THE reference to Downey brought an angry flush to Brink's face. "You tryin' to tell me how to handle my own prisoner?"

Red grinned. "You haven't got any prisoner, Brink — unless I unlock those handcuffs." He paused as his eye rested for a moment on the back of Brink's hand from which blood dripped slowly to the floor. Stepping to a shelf, he secured a bottle and crossed to the bunk.

"Hold still a minute till I put some iodine on it," he said. "No sense in getting infection. It'll quit bleeding in a few minutes. I'm pulling out now—clearing out of the country. I'll set the water pail where you can reach it and throw this robe over you. You won't freeze—and Bergland will be here tomorrow. I'm hanging the key to the cuffs over here on this nail where he can get it and turn you loose when he comes. I'm taking your gun, though, and your grub — it might come in handy. I'm taking Berglund's sled and his dogs, too."

"You'll never make it, Shane," growled Brink. "You'll never get out of the bush. Too many people know you. An' we'll notify all detachments from Halifax to the Yukon."

Red shrugged. "I've got a chance—and that's more than I'd have if I stayed. So long, Brink. Don't lose any more prisoners. And say hello to Corporal Downey for me when you see him. He's going to be tickled to death with the way you've handled your murder cases."

"Go to hell, Shane!" growled the discomforted constable. "You win this trick —but the game ain't over, by a damn sight. I'll get you yet! I'll bring you into Norway House, dead or alive—if it's the last thing I ever do."

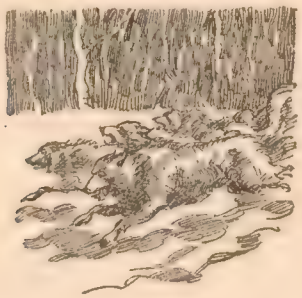
"Okay," grinned Red, "make it alive, if it's just the same to you, Brink. I want at least that much of a break."

CHAPTER VI

NIGHT CAMP

IT WAS bright starlight when Red Shane swung the six big dogs across the little prairie, and into the sparse timber. Fragments of clouds scudded across the heavens, driven by the strong northwest wind. He headed in a southeasterly direction, cross the Big Black miles above Berglund's Post, and shaped his course to miss the head waters of the Poplar. This, he reasoned, would carry him out of Man-

itoba into the sparsely inhabited Patricia District of Ontario, and he could eventually reach the railway far to the eastward of any place where he was known.



Toward dawn he crossed a lake of considerable size, the wind-packed snow of its frozen surface furnishing excellent footing. Gaunt gray shapes flanked his trail, holding well out of rifle shot on the left, and on the right. He counted fourteen of the huge timber wolves—great gaunt beasts, driven southward by scarcity of the caribou in the north. Reaching the opposite shore, he built a small fire in the shelter of a thicket that gave a long view of the back trail, boiled a pail of tea, and fried some pork. He estimated that, with his own supplies and Brink's, he could travel for ten days. After that he'd have to depend on his rifle and fish lines, and maybe what little food he could buy from some native. He figured he should reach the railway in fifteen or twenty days, according to the amount of soft snow he encountered.

Breakfast over, he pushed on, following lakes and rivers and open prairies whenever possible to gain the advantage of wind-packed snow. When he camped that night he estimated he had covered sixty miles.

"And I'll bet I've got twenty-four hours start of Brink, too," he mused as he sat beside his little fire and grinned. His toggled dogs whined uneasily, bristled and growled at the wolf-scent that drifted to their nostrils, and beyond the circle of the firelight he could catch, here and there, the green-red gleam of eyes. "Brink would have to wait for Berglund to release him, then he'd have to go to Berglund's Post for supplies. Bet he's at Berglund's right now—waiting for morning to hit out on my trail."

The tea pail boiled, and from the pan the appetizing odor of sizzling pork rose to tantalize Red's nostrils. He suddenly realized that he was tired, and very hungry. As he dropped the tea into the boiling water he noted that the eyes there in the outer dark seemed to be pressing closer. Red wondered whether the smell of the frying meat whetted their appetites, too. One huge brute, bolder than the rest, squatted close enough to be dimly outlined on the outer edge of the firelight. Red could make out the gaunt gray shape — could now and then catch a glimpse of gleaming white fangs, and a long red tongue that lolled slathering, from the half-open mouth. Red shuddered slightly and was conscious of a prickling sensation at the back of his neck. He realized how a dog felt when he bristled. He was not afraid; weird stories to the contrary notwithstanding, he knew that the knowing ones all said that wolves would never attack a man. Yet—the prickling sensation returned with each glance at the ominous gray shape at the edge of the firelight.

Drawing Brink's service pistol from his pocket, he took deliberate aim at the shadowy form and pressed the trigger. The roar of the gun blended with a sharp sound—half yelp, half snarl as the great brute leaped into the air and disappeared in the pandemonium of growls and snarls and breaking twigs as the pack rushed to the kill. Within the firelight the dogs cowered and whined as they strained at their toggles to crowd closer to the man. The commotion subsided, and as Red devoured his pork and sipped his scalding tea, the only sounds from the dark were the soft crunching sounds of teeth on bones.

Half an hour later Red laid his plate aside, threw more wood on the fire, and

spread his blankets, arranging them within arm's reach of the firewood, and so he could lie between the fire and the row of toggled dogs. This, he assured himself, was not through fear—it was merely precaution. The knowing ones all agreed that wolves would not attack, but—

The bed arranged to his liking, he rolled his twill parka for a pillow, placed Brink's pistol beside it, ready to hand, and turned to inspect his supply of firewood. Despite what the knowing ones said, he would keep the fire going—not for the warmth it emitted, but because its wavering light gave a certain sense of security.

Suddenly behind him sounded the heavy, throaty growl of a dog where a moment before there had been only a craven whining. Red whirled in time to see a huge shape launch itself out of the darkness. In the fleeting instant before he threw himself backward to sprawl in a heap over the firewood pile, he caught the gleam of firelight on the naked bit of an upraised axe. The next instant the growls redoubled in fury, as the shape lunged forward across the spread blankets. There was a sudden shower of sparks and glowing brands that fell hissing into the snow and sent up spurts of gray smoke as the scene was plunged into comparative darkness. Wild shrieks of pain mingled with the ferocious growling of the dogs, as Red struggled to his knees to see, in the smoky halflight the figure of a huge man leap to its feet, screaming horribly, and frantically clawing live coals from beard and parka neck.

RED'S movement drew the attention of the clawing, shrieking figure, and with a wild, animal-like scream it caught up the axe, at the same moment that Red's hand closed about the butt of Brink's service pistol. The axe swung high as Red brought the pistol into line and pressed the trigger; again he pressed it—and yet again, its muzzle a scant dozen feet from the midriff of the figure with the upraised axe. Then the figure suddenly collapsed, whirled half around, and measured its length across the embers of the scattered fire, blotting out the little remaining light. For tense seconds Red knelt on his blankets until roused by the smell of burning cloth. Leaping to his feet he bent over the prostrate figure and rolled it from the coals, dousing several glowing spots in the parka with handfuls of snow. Hastily scraping together the scattered brands, he heaped on more wood, and when the flames crackled among the dry spruce sticks, lighting the scene, he turned his attention to the figure in the snow. It needed but a glance to show that one at least, of the three bullets had found a vital spot. The dead man was middle-aged, his bearded face gaunt and drawn.

"Dufresne, the crazy trapper Brink told me about!" Red exclaimed, glancing at the axe that lay where it had fallen when the man dropped. "He killed his wife and kids with an axe—and he damn near got me!"

Low growls from the toggled dogs drew Red's attention to a harnessed team that stood on the outer rim of the firelight, the leader with bared fangs, growling savagely in return. Striding to the team, he swung them around the tied dogs to the opposite side of the fire, and examined the outfit; a good sled, five gaunt, hungry dogs, one blanket, one caribou robe, and two of wolfskins, a rifle—a cloth bag containing a quarter of a pound of tea, half a cake of bitter chocolate, a few matches, a fishline with half a dozen hooks attached, fifteen rifle cartridges—and nothing else. He unharnessed the dogs, toggled them, and fed them liberally from his supply of dried fish.

"Poor devil," he muttered, glancing at the dead man. "He was just about bushed. It's better to die the way he did. He probably heard my shot when I fired at the wolf, then sneaked up on my fire and attacked. If that dog hadn't jumped up

just when he did, tightening his line and tripping Dufresne, he'd have split my skull to the shoulders."

Reaching for his tea pail, Red filled it with snow and nested it against the blaze. Seated on his blankets he stared somberly at the prostrate figure beyond the little fire. From the rim of the outer dark, he caught the flicker of a pair of red-green eyes. For long moments he sat, his arms hugging his knees, then suddenly he leaned forward gazing tensely at the dead man.

"Why not?" he muttered excitedly. "Why not exchange identities with Dufresne? He's about my size—and if the wolves are as hungry in the morning as they were a while ago, they won't leave enough of him for Brink to identify! But I've got to strip his clothes off before he stiffens!"

RISING, he stepped to the inert figure and swiftly began to remove its clothing—parka, shirt, moccasins, socks, trousers and underclothing, leaving it naked on the snow. He piled the clothing at the foot of his bed, and for a long time, sat and drank cup after cup of scalding tea. Then he smiled grimly.

"From here on," he muttered, "it looks like Brink's going to get his murder cases badly mixed."

Despite the fact that Red had been twenty hours on the trail, he slept fitfully, waking every little while to toss wood on the fire. At daylight, he ate a hurried breakfast, and set to work on his outfit. He tossed his duffel bag into the snow, and loaded the rest of his stuff onto the mad trapper's sled, together with all of the dead man's effects. Then he exchanged his own clothing for the dead man's, retaining only his own underwear — he couldn't bring himself to don the filthy suit he had removed from Dufresne's body. He placed the corpse between his own blankets and piled his own clothing on top, being careful to leave Brink's pistol, and his own rifle and axe, within arm's reach of the body. Harnessing Dufresne's dogs, he turned the Berglund dogs loose, and leaving his own sled, headed southeastward.

Chapter VII

CONSTABLE RRINK TAKES THE TRAIL

IT WAS well along in the afternoon when Torg Berglund arrived at Red Shane's cabin to find Brink raging helplessly in Red's bunk, handcuffed to the stanchion. It was but the work of a moment for him to free the officer by means of the key which Red had left hanging from a nail on the opposite wall. Briefly Brink dismissed his predicament with the explanation that Red had struck him over the head with a billet of stovewood after giving his word that he would not resist.

"An' now we've got to get back to the post," he concluded. "Red said he was takin' my supplies, and I'll have to get more and hit out on his trail. We'll take Sven's body back with us and leave it in the storeroom of the fur loft where it will keep for the coroner. You get word to Downey at Norway House. You don't need to say anything about me arrestin' Red, an' him gettin' away. I can tell him about that, later. Just say that Red murdered Sven, an' skipped out, an' I happened along just afterwards huntin' for Dufresne, an' that I hit out on Red's trail. Tell him he better send someone else down here. I can't handle both Red an' Dufresne alone."

Torg nodded sombrely, as they finished securing Sven's body onto the sled, after lowering it from the cache. "Poor Sven. I mistrusted somethin' had happened to him when he didn't come back yesterday. That's why I wanted you should come over here an' see."

"It's a damn wonder you wouldn't have come over before this to find out," growled Brink.

"I know'd you was here, an' I expected

you to show up any minute at the post. So I waited. I didn't figger no policeman would let a kid like Red Shane git the best of him."

"It jest goes to show you can't trust no one," snapped Brink, testily. "He promised if I wouldn't handcuff him till after supper, he wouldn't make no break. An' the first time I turned my head he clouted me with a stick of firewood, an' the next thing I know'd I was chained to the bunk. But I'll get him! Next time you can bet I won't show him no favors. I'll bring him in, dead or alive—an' don't you forget it. Come on—let's mush."

The early darkness had already descended when Brink got his outfit loaded for the trail. "No use startin' out now," he decided. "I can't follow his trail at night, anyhow. I'll get an early start in the mornin', an' if I don't run into any more storms I'll overtake him in a couple of days."

AN Indian came in, and Brink dispatched him, post haste, to Norway House with a note to Corporal Downey. At daylight he pulled out of Berglund's Post, and an hour later picked up Red's trail and urged his dogs to the utmost. In vain he searched for sign that the other had camped, but the trail held steadily to its southeastward course.

"If he traveled all night, he laid up yesterday," he muttered. "A man can't keep on goin' all the time, no matter how bad he wants to."

Just at the edge of darkness he came upon the spot where Red had stopped to boil his pail of tea the morning before. He scowled as he noted that the other had not spread his blankets, nor even unharnessed his dogs. Brink camped for the night. "He can't keep that up," he assured himself. "I'll come up with him in a couple of days. An' when I do, he'll be plumb wore out. A man's got to sleep to keep goin'."

Again daylight found him on the trail. He frowned as he noted that it held to the southeastward. He had expected that Red would swing southwest for the Beatty cabin. He was glad, now, that he hadn't played the hunch that came to him at Berglund's, and hit straight for the girl's cabin in the hope of overtaking the fugitive there. Wolves flanked his trail at a respectful distance. He fired once or twice at them with Berglund's rifle which he had borrowed to take the place of his service pistol. Toward noon, as he descended onto the ice of a lake, he saw two moving objects far out on its white surface. The objects drew steadily nearer, evidently following Red Shane's back trail. Then he saw other objects—gaunt gray shapes that swung wide on either side of him, and rushed toward the two approaching objects.

BRINK suddenly realized that the approaching objects were dogs, and that they had increased their speed. They had seen him, and were streaking toward him at top speed, as the wolves that had been following his own outfit converged on them swiftly. Brink yelled at the top of his lungs, and urged his dogs forward. He jerked the rifle from its covering and fired at the wolves. The first of the two dogs

was within rifle shot when the wolves swerved and concentrated on the other. There was a swirl of flying snow, a loud frenzied yelp, and a blur of fighting, tearing shapes, as the wolves tore at the doomed dog. As the other rushed cowering to his side, he saw at a glance that it was one of the Berglund dogs—one of the team that Red Shane had taken for

his get-away. Whimpering, the dog fell to heel and followed, hugging close against the sled for protection. Brink was within range, now, of the pack that ripped and tore at the mangled thing that had been the other dog. Dropping to one knee, he sighted the rifle and fired. A wolf staggered a few steps and fell, clawing at the snow with his fore feet. He fired again, and another great brute dropped to the snow. A third time he pressed the trigger, and a wolf left the pack and pulled himself away, dragging his hind quarters. Then, as though suddenly becoming aware of their danger, the others scattered, and ran, some of the famished brutes carrying bleeding fragments in their huge jaws.

ANOTHER shot dispatched the wounded wolf, and Brink's glance sought the remains of the mangled carcass that lay on the trampled and blood splashed snow, ripped and torn out of all semblance of the dog it had been only a few short moments before. Involuntarily he shuddered, as he recognized from the color of a patch of torn hide, another of Berglund's dogs. What had happened? Why were Berglund's dogs back-trailing for home? What had become of Red Shane? And where were the other four dogs? The officer's glance rested regretfully for a moment on the three dead animals—huge caribou wolves of the north. He thought of the bounty, but decided he could neither add their weight to his load nor stop to skin them—so he pushed on, with Berglund's dog trotting at his heels.

At mid-afternoon he came upon the scene of another kill—blood-soaked, trampled snow, some bones gnawed clean of meat, and a few bunches of dog hair. An hour later he saw where another of the dogs had been devoured by the wolves. This left only two of the dogs unaccounted for. Brink was conscious of a distinct feeling of uneasiness as his mind reverted to the swift ferocity of the attack on the dog out there on the lake. Had the wolves raided Shane's camp while he slept? Or had the dogs pulled out and left him, hitting the back-trail to Berglund's? If so—what had become of Shane? He knew that the knowing ones said that wolves would not attack a man, but the wolves were more plentiful this year than ever before—and they looked gaunter, and hungrier, and more fearless. Brink urged his team to a faster pace as the short afternoon wore to its close. If the dogs had deserted Shane in his camp, Brink reasoned that the man was in no immediate danger. He had plenty of food, and his rifle, besides Brink's pistol. He would probably push on with a back-pack, and if so, Brink knew that he would soon overtake him.

Traveling ahead of the dogs through a growth of sparse spruce, interspersed with thicker copses, Brink cast about for a suitable camping spot, as he marveled at the ability of Shane to have pushed on this far with a halt for only a single meal. "What happened—he prob'ly shoved on till he got so damn tired he dropped in his tracks, an' the wolves jumped him," he muttered. "But—he must have camped. Them dogs had be'n unharnessed."

Topping a slight rise, he halted abruptly and stared at a sled that showed indistinct in the fast gathering dusk at the edge of a thicker grove of spruce. Swinging the rifle he had been carrying since the encounter with the wolves, into position for instant use, he called, loudly:

"Come out of there, Shane! An' come out with yer hands in the air!" Receiving no reply, he called again: "The jig's up, Shane! You can't beat the law! You can't shove on without dogs!" Silence greeted the words that Brink had striven to make ring stern and impressive, but which, even to his own ears, sounded puny and thin amid the vast stillness of the bush. Behind him a dog whimpered uneasily. It was the Berglund dog—sole survivor of the team of six big huskies.

Stark terror gripped Constable Brink. The profound silence of the ever deepening dusk seemed fraught with unseen dangers—Shane crouching there in the scrub, finger on trigger, waiting to drill him through the heart if he so much as moved!

GRIPPING the rifle, his eyes darted here and there seeking some slight movement that would betray the man's hiding place. But there was no movement. Suppose Shane was not lurking in the edge of the scrub? Suppose he had succumbed to fatigue, had decided to camp, unharnessed the dogs, and lain down—and then the wolves had come? A chill that held more of stark terror than of fear ran up and down his spine.

As he stood there in the dusk, the realization dawned on Brink that he dreaded more what he would find on the snow near that sled, than he dreaded the sudden swift impact of a bullet. Behind him the dog whimpered again, and Brink turned and kicked at him in a panic of senseless fury.

"Shut up, damn you!" His voice rang thin and high-pitched—the voice of a man whose nerves were at the snapping point. And it was the sound of his own unnatural voice that restored him to some semblance of sanity. His lips pressed tight, as his eyes once again swept the thicket. Then he advanced toward the sled—to hell with Shane! If he was going to shoot—he'd shoot! If the wolves had got him, there would be evidence of it in the snow—bones, maybe, and pieces of cloth from his clothing—and he, Brink would collect these things and take them to Norway House as proof of his death.

A few moments later, the constable paused beside the sled and stared in horror at the trampled snow beyond. Scattered about near the ashes of a fire were several blankets, and some clothing which he recognized as Shane's—the checked woolen trousers, and the heavy shirt of red wool—the candy-stripe capote. But the clothing was not torn to shreds and fragments! Surely, if the wolves had attacked, they would have ripped the clothing from Shane's body. Brink stepped to the dead ashes of the fire, and scrutinized the ground more closely. Once more stark horror gripped him as his gaze fixed on the grisly objects strewn about upon the trampled area beyond the fire—bones—human bones—and a skull with the lower jaw missing!

"Good God!" he breathed in a husky whisper. "They came in the night! He was asleep in his blankets—that's why his clothing wasn't torn to pieces!" He shuddered—then as terror gripped him again, he cried aloud, "They lied, damn 'em! The old-timers that claim wolves won't attack a man! They lied like hell! The wolves got Shane while he slept!"

LAYING the rifle aside, the constable jerked the axe from beneath the lashing of his load, and feverishly attacked a dead spruce tree. A few moments later red tongues of flame were licking and crackling at the twigs as he heaped on more and more fuel. With his fire going, he unharnessed and toggled his dogs as close to the fire as he could. He dragged his sleeping bag close, filled his tea pail with snow, and sliced a big ration of bacon. This he devoured together with chunks of the bread he had baked at Berglund's, washing it down with huge draughts of tea. The meal over, he chopped more firewood, piling it close until he had a sufficient supply to last throughout the night.

"They got Shane—but they won't get me, damn 'em!" he muttered. "I'll lay here by the fire—but I won't sleep. They won't come to a fire—they're afraid of fire; they're bound to be—even a dog is afraid of a fire. Shane let his fire go out, so they got him." Brink muttered thus reassuringly to himself, as he sat on his sleeping bag drawn as close to the fire as its heat would permit. From time to time

he threw on more wood, taking comfort in the red flames, and the showers of sparks that shot skyward. Two or three times during the night that seemed endless, he fired a shot at the red-green eyes that glared at him from beyond the circle of the firelight. Following one of these shots, he heard the ominous rush of padded feet—the swift impact of bodies, the vicious snarling, the soft crunching of bones from the dark. It helped him to fight off the drowsiness that several times brought him to the verge of a deep sleep.

Chapter VIII

THE END OF THE TRAIL

AT THE first hint of dawn he cooked and ate a hearty breakfast. When the light strengthened, he spread one of Shane's blankets and piled the bones on it. A pitifully small pile of tooth-scarred fragments—ten pounds, maybe, thought Brink—as he stood staring down at those gruesome remains.

One thing puzzled him—the absence of blood on the trampled snow. He remembered the scene of the wolf attack on the dog—how the snow had been splashed and spattered with blood. So had the other two places where the wolves had killed a dog. But here there was almost no blood on the snow. "Must be they had more time to clean it up—hungry as they was, they prob'ly stayed here an' et the bloody snow," he decided.

As the light increased, Brink ranged wider to see if he could find some more fragments. He had proceeded but a few steps when he halted and stared in open-mouthed astonishment at a trail that led off from the camp toward the southeastward—the trail of a man and a dog team! "What the hell!" he breathed, astounded at the sight. Then suddenly he stepped close and, dropping to his knees beside the trail, scrutinized it minutely. "Good God Almighty!" he gasped. "It's Dufresne's trail! I followed it long enough to know his tracks, an' his dogs, an' his sled's! The wolves didn't kill Shane! It was Dufresne! He slipped up on him in the night, an' murdered him, an' made off with his grub! That's why there was no grub around his camp. I thought the wolves had eaten it—but Dufresne took it.

"The wolves finished him up after Dufresne left him here dead!" Corporal Brink heaved a sigh of vast relief. "I guess them old-timers know, after all. I sure wish I'd found it out last night—an' I'd have caught me some sleep. I must have be'n plumb jittery."

Circling the gruesome camp, the constable found the spot where the wolves had devoured the one he had shot during the night, and also the one Shane had shot. He found the trail made by Dufresne as he approached Red's camp—the short-spaced foot tracks, and the frequent pauses of his stealthy approach—the spot where he had left his outfit, just beyond the circle of the firelight—and the long strides where he had leaped forward upon the unsuspecting man, probably with axe upraised. Brink recollected with a shudder that it was with an axe that the mad trapper had murdered his wife and children.

Hastily he gathered Shane's clothing into a blanket which he made into a bundle. He secured Shane's axe and his rifle, and his own service pistol. "Prob'ly wasted these shells peckin' at the eyes that showed in the dark," he muttered, as he reloaded it and thrust it into his holster. "He might better have saved 'em for Dufresne." He eyed the skull grimly as he wrapped the bones in the blanket. "I told you I'd take you to Norway House, dead or alive—an' I will," he muttered.

ADDING the grisly package to his load, together with the rest of Shane's belongings, he harnessed his dogs, after standing Berglund's sled on end against a tree to be reclaimed later. Then

he struck out on the trail that led to the southeastward.

As Brink urged his dogs onward he was conscious of a feeling of supreme satisfaction. He would overtake Dufresne, arrest him, and take him back to Berglund's Post, where Corporal Downey himself would probably be waiting, if the Indian had delivered the message telling of Sven Berglund's murder. With two solved murders to his credit, it wouldn't be long till he'd be getting his stripes. Even Downey, who had always seemed skeptical of his ability, would have to admit that he was a real policeman. And with Red Shane out of the way, maybe Louise Beatty would have eyes for someone else. He'd ask for leave as soon as he got his promotion, and swing down to old Tom's cabin on the Poplar. She'd notice his stripes, the first thing—and then —well, it isn't every girl that gets the chance to marry a corporal of the Mounted Police!

For twelve days he followed the trail that held undeviatingly to the southeastward. At night he camped with scarcely a thought for the wolves that flanked his course by day, and hung about on the outer edge of the firelight, by night. He marveled at the mad trapper's endurance, and at his ability to hold undeviatingly to his course.

In the bush near the outskirts of a small village on the railway, on the thirteenth day after leaving Red Shane's camp, he came abruptly to the end of the trail. Cached in a dense thicket he found a dog-sled and harness for the team. Undoing the lashings, Brink inspected the mad trapper's tattered blankets, his robes, his rifle, a scant store of the police rations Red Shane had appropriated, and his axe. Brink shuddered as he gingerly handled the axe—undoubtedly the same Dufresne had used to murder his wife and children, and Red Shane. Leaving the things where he found them, he proceeded to the single store where he was greeted by the proprietor, an old man who peered interestedly at him through a pair of cloudy steel spectacles.

"Any strangers been in town, lately?" Brink asked casually.

THE oldster scratched thoughtfully at a shaggy gray eyebrow with a gnarled black thumbnail. "No. Can't say as they has. Lookin' fer someone?"

"Yes, replied Brink, "a trapper — a Frenchman by the name of Dufresne."

"Never heer'd the name. What fer lookin' is he?"

"He'd weight somewheres around a hundred an' eighty, or ninety—good sized man—around six foot."

"Ain't much trappin' 'round here, no more," observed the man. "Mostly they work in the woods—a leetle loggin', but mostly it's pulpwood. When was he s'posed to be here?"

"Oh—three or four days ago. Do the passenger trains stop here?"

"Nope — only when they're flagged down. Ain't stopped since Tuesday, a week, when they tuk Sime Black's woman away. Yup—tuk her to Winnipeg, to the horspital. Her guts got to ailin' her somethin' fierce. Sime, he give her enough salts to kill a horse, but it didn't help her none, so he got Doc Ames from the camp to take a look at her. Doc claimed it was the apendeetus, an' she'd got to have a operation, so they flagged Number Eight an' h'isted her on."

"Any other trains stop here?"

"Oh shore — the local freight stops twict a week, reg'lar — an' other times when they've got logs on the sidin' to pick

up. But you bet I wouldn't let none of them doctors cut into my guts, would you? What I claim—if salts can't cure a man's belly ache—er a woman's—the chances is, they're time's come, anyhow."

"The doctors can cure 'em by operatin', most times, I guess," Brink replied. "I suppose anyone could slip onto the freight an' hide somewheres, without anyone knowin' it, couldn't they?"

"Not me, they wouldn't! How do you know what they'd do to you, onct they got you chloroformed? Shore a man could hop the freight. That's the way most folks comes an' goes; except wimmin—they don't have to pay no fare."

"Seen any stray dogs around in the last few days?"

"Dogs? Shore—six sled dogs come snookin' around the store, here, three, four days ago. They wasn't no dogs from around these parts. They was g'anted up, some—like they'd come from quite a ways. Sime Black, he tuk 'em over to his place. He's kinda lonesome, what with his woman gone—an' God knows what's happenin' to her—so he claimed them dogs would be comp'ny fer him. A loggin' horse died an' they drug him to the edge of the swamp, back of Sime's, an' them dogs is livin' off it. When they've got it et up, Sime's goin' to be put to it to feed 'em. They eat like a wolf."

"They're Dufresne's dogs," explained Brink. "I'll take 'em off his hands."

"But why would a trapper turn his dogs loose an' hop a freight? They're good dogs—worth money."

"He's s'posed to be crazy," Brink explained. "Murdered his wife an' kids with an axe, an' another man, too. I've be'n trailin' him for weeks. Is there a phone here—long distance? I'd better call up Headquarters for orders. I can't get in touch with Corporal Downey, at Norway House."

"Norway House, eh? Good gosh! You ain't trailed that crazy feller clean down from Norway House have you?"

"Yes, from near there. He lived in our district. Where's the phone? I want to get Winnipeg."

"It's in the backroom. Usta be in here, but McGregor, he's woods boss fer the loggin' comp'ny, he uses it more'n anyone else—an' he claimed he didn't want fer everyone in the store here to be listenin' to what he was sayin', so he had it moved in back. He talks clean to Chicago, sometimes, an' other places, too—orderin' stuff fer the comp'ny. Beats all what a sight of stuff they've got to buy—makes a body wonder how they get it all paid fer. Jest give a long ring, an' the lady down to the Junction'll git you Winnipeg—er even Montreal, if you want her to. Beats all how them wires kin carry a man's voice over 'em—an' you don't need to holler no louder'n what I be, right now."

BRINK got his call through to the inspector on duty at D Division Headquarters, and reported the murder of Sven Berglund, and the subsequent murder of Red Shane by Dufresne, the mad trapper.

He told of trailing the trapper to the railway, and of locating his outfit and his dogs. The inspector ordered him to mail in an inventory of the trapper's outfit, and leave it with the man who had the dogs, with instructions to turn dogs and outfit over to a policeman who would call for it, shortly. The inspector said that Downey had already sent in word of the Berglund murder by messenger, and that the police had been on the watch for Red Shane, but that now he would kill that order, and send out word for them to pick up Dufresne, whom Brink described to the best of his ability. Brink was ordered to return at once to Berglund's Post with Shane's remains, as a coroner had already started for that point to hold an inquest upon Sven Berglund. He would dispatch a messenger at once to notify the coroner to await Brink's return.

Two weeks later, the constable pulled

into Berglund's, to find Downey and the coroner awaiting him.

Chapter IX

Corporal Downey Takes a Hand

CORPORAL DOWNEY looked up one evening late in December, as Constable Brink stepped into the little cabin that served as a bunk house and office of the Mounted Police at Norway House.

"I'll slip over an' have Hodgson put up a couple weeks' supplies," he said. "You get a tent outfit together—an' be sure you put in plenty robes, an' them winter sleepin' bags. We'll be pullin' out for Berglund's in the mornin'—might hang around there a week or ten days."

"Berglund's!"

"Yeah. I hear there's goin' to be big doin's down there at the Christmas tradin'. I hear Torg's gittin' married."

"Some squaw, I s'pose. Got tired of doin' his own cookin', an' figgers it's cheaper to marry one than hire her."

"He's marryin' old Tom Beatty's girl."

"Tom Beatty's girl! You mean Louise Beatty's goin' to marry that damn Swede! Hell—he's old enough to be her father, if he's a day!"

"That's what a trapper claimed that was up there a couple of days ago."

Brink frowned. "Don't know what Louise would see in him to marry—keeps himself half-pickled on that alcohol an' water, all the time. A girl like her ought to marry some young fella."

"Guess when Red Shane passed out of the picture, she jest didn't give a damn. At that, I guess she wouldn't be marryin' Torg unless she had to."

"Had to?"

"Yeah, Bill Jessup — he's the trapper that told me—he says Torg has got old Tom so deep in debt that he can't never pay out. An' besides that, he says Torg made out a schedule of assets that old Tom was s'posed to own, includin' a big swipe of pulpwood land, an' got Tom to sign it one time, when he was half-soused, tellin' him it was jest a matter of form, so he could give him more debt. Then after young Shane was gone, he cracked down on old Tom, threatenin' to seize everything he had to satisfy his debt, an' threatenin' to have him throw'd in jail for obtaining credit by fraud. Torg offered to give Tom a receipt in full, an' tear up the schedule, if the girl would marry him. An' accordin' to Jessup, the girl agreed to do it, to save old Tom."

"It's a damn shame!" Brink exclaimed. "Ain't there nothin' we can do?"

DOWNEY shook his head doubtfully. "It would be pretty hard to make a blackmail case like that stick. Kind of looks like Torg's got things pretty much his own way. We'll sort of look around when we get there, an' see."

"We won't be takin' a stove, will we? We can sleep inside, at Berglund's."

"Take the stove," Downey replied. "What with everyone in off the trap lines, an' all the Injuns an' squaws that'll be sleepin' packed in like sardines on the floors, an' all the doors an' windows shut, it would be like sleepin' in a sewer, by mornin'. Me—I like my air first hand, an' fresh."

"What we goin' to Berglund's fer? To see that Torg don't peddle no hooch to the Injuns?"

"That'll be your job, mostly—that an' keepin' order in case they'd get to fightin' amongst themselves. I want to talk to them witnesses that heard Red Shane threaten Sven Berglund, that day. I've got a list of 'em here, but I ain't talked to only two, three of 'em. I went up to the Injun village, but most of 'em was off on their trap-lines—an' all the white trappers was—so I decided to wait till Christmas tradin' time, when they'd all be in."

"But Red Shane's dead. What difference does it make, now, about his threats?"

Downey's gaze centered on the con-

stable's face for what seemed a long time. "Didn't it never occur to you, Brink, that mebbe Red Shane didn't kill Sven? That someone else might have done it?"

"Someone else! Who could have?"

"There's a lot of folks in the world besides Red Shane. There's Torg, for instance."

"Torg! That's what Shane claimed. But Torg couldn't have done it. He was at the post when I got there. It was Torg that sent me to Red's—said he was worried about Sven."

"Why was he worried?"

"Why—because Shane had threatened to kill Sven for somethin' he said about Red an' Louise Beatty. Torg said he tried to persuade Sven not to go to Red's when he got back from Moose Lake, but Sven insisted on takin' the stuff Red ordered. Claimed he wasn't afraid of Red—that his threats was only wind—so he went. An' then, when Sven didn't come back, Torg was worried."

"How long had he be'n gone?"

"Several hours—long enough so Torg figured he ought to be back."

"Didn't it occur to you that if Sven had be'n gone for several hours, Torg would have had plenty of time to have followed him to Red Shane's shack, shot him, an' got back to the post before you got there."

"I never thought of it that way. Hell—a man wouldn't kill his own brother!"

DOWNEY grinned. "The first murder in the world was a brother killin' accordin' to the Bible."

"But—why would he kill him? Cripes—they was pardners! An' they was doin' well with the tradin' post."

"Yeah," replied Downey dryly, "an' if two of 'em was doin' well; one would do twice as well, wouldn't he? Then, there's the matter of insurance. When I was down there Torg showed me two policies for five thousan' each—one on Torg an' the other on Sven, each namin' the other as beneficiary—an' double indemnity in case of violent death. I signed an affidavit to send in to the company that Sven's death was violent. Besides that, a year or so ago I witnessed a couple of wills for the Berglunds. Torg showed me the wills—each left all his property to the other in case of death. Those are motives enough to start a policeman to thinkin'. Then there's other things. What few folks I talked to that heard Shane's threats, claimed that Red come into Berglund's that day an' paid for the gas he'd got to take Beattys down home with, an' that he told Torg he was through with him—an' didn't want nothin' to do with him from then on. Said he'd trade at Norway House in the future. Accused Torg of changin' his light to set him on the reef. But accordin' to your report, Torg told you Sven went to Red's to collect for that gas—an' took a bill of goods Red had ordered. Them statements don't jibe."

"I didn't know what them witnesses had to say," defended Brink. "I didn't have time to talk to none of 'em. I hit right out after Red as quick as Torg let me loose from Red's bunk."

"Accordin' to your report, Red told you he hadn't ordered no goods from Berglund."

"I didn't give no heed to what he said. A man would tell any lie he could think up to git out of a murder. He admitted threatenin' Sven."

"He didn't admit shootin' him, did he?"

"No, he claimed Torg done it—said he seen ski tracks leadin' from a clump of brush."

"There's another thing," persisted Cor-

poral Downey, eyeing the other. "I didn't see nothin' in your report about interviewin' Sleepy Joe—"

"Sleepy Joe!"

"Yeah, Sleepy Joe was Red's man. You knew that, knew he'd be'n workin' for him all summer an' fall—with him every day. If anyone knew how Red felt about the Berglunds, he would. An' Sleepy Joe was at Berglund's post when you got there, an' you never questioned him—never even mentioned in your report that he was there. Why's that?"

CONSTABLE BRINK flushed to the hair roots, under Downey's gaze. "Why—well, to tell the truth, Sleepy Joe was so drunk he was dead to the world. I couldn't have questioned him about nothin'. He was layin' there asleep on a pile of robes in the tradin' room."

"Drunk, was he? Where'd he get his liquor?"

"Why—I—er—I don't know where he got it."

"Sleepy Joe's a breed, an' a breed's an Injun, under the law—an' you, a policeman, find an' Injun dead drunk in a tradin' post, an' don't investigate to find out where he got his liquor. An' don't even mention in your report that you'd seen a drunken Injun! Why's that?"

"I figgered that investigatin' a murder was more important than investigatin' a drunk."

Corporal Downey's steel gray eyes narrowed ever so slightly. "If Sleepy Joe was layin' there in the tradin' room drunk, you must have seen him as soon as you went in there—long before Torg had a chance to tell you anything about a murder. That don't look so good, Brink—not in this force, it don't. There must have be'n a reason. But as a matter of fact, Brink, if you had investigated Sleepy Joe's case, you'd have found out he wasn't drunk, at all—just playin' drunk. He stopped at Berglund's for a couple of days on his way to the village to get Red Shane's dogs. He didn't trust the Berglunds—either one of 'em—an' he wanted to find out if they was plottin' to get Red, somehow. So he bought a quart of watered alcohol from Torg an' drank enough of it to get a breath, an' poured the rest down a knot-hole, an' played drunk. He was layin' there that way when Sven got back from Moose Lake. Sven raised hell about lettin' drunken Injuns lay around the post—then Torg sent him to Red's with those goods he told Sven Red had ordered, an' told him to collect for the gas. He didn't tell Sven a damn word about Red's threat to kill him. Then, after Sven left, Torg took his rifle, an' struck out after him. It was stormin' that day as you'll remember, an' ski tracks would soon drift over. Torg was gone an hour an' three quarters. Then he come back, cleaned his rifle, an' a half an hour later you come in. I talked with Sleepy Joe later an' he told me all about it."

"If he'd be'n there when I got back to Berglund's, I'd of questioned him," said Brink sulkily. "Torg said he'd pulled out early that mornin'."

"YEAH," said Downey grimly, "an' if you'd investigated that statement, you might have found somethin' of interest. It had quit snowin' by that time, an' if he'd pulled out in the mornin', the tracks of his goin' would have been plain. As a matter of fact, Torg thought Sleepy Joe was as drunk as you thought he was—an' jest to make sure you didn't raise no hell about him bein' that way, Torg loaded him onto a sled an' hauled him up the river. He dumped him an' a pack sack with enough grub in it to take him to the village out onto the snow. He done that after you left—before it quit snowin', so the tracks would be drifted over. An' if Sleepy Joe had be'n as drunk as he seemed to be, Torg Berglund would of got away with another murder. Later, if someone had found what the wolves left of Sleepy Joe or his outfit, it would have be'n just an-

other case of a man gettin' bushed. No one would have suspected Torg."

"After I got back to Berglund's I was so hell-bent to take out after Red Shane, fer what he done to me, that I didn't give a damn about Sleepy Joe."

"You still think Red killed Sven?"

"Sure I do. He admitted threatenin' him, didn't he? He had a motive, an' the opportunlty, an' a gun, didn't he?"

"So had Torg. I noticed in your report, you said that Red told you he saw fresh ski tracks near the scene of the murder. Did you investigate those tracks?"

"No—it wouldn't of be'n no use. They'd of be'n all drifted over, by that time, the way it was snowin' an' blowin'—an' besides, I didn't believe there was any tracks. I figgered Red was lyin'."

"You knew Red pretty well—did he impress you as bein' a man that would shoot an unarmed man from ambush? I noticed in your report that there was no weapon on or near Sven's body, and that his rifle was inside its canvas cover."

"He prob'ly would if he was mad enough," replied Brink surlily. "Hell—he clouted me over the head with a stove chunk when I wasn't lookin', didn't he?"

Downey nodded. "That's the way you've got it down in your report," he replied dryly. "Go ahead an' get the outfit ready, an' I'll slip over an' see Hodgson about the supplies."

Chapter X

CONSTABLE BRINK SEES A GHOST

THERE was a gala atmosphere about Berglund's Post as the two police officers pulled in and pitched their tent in a protected spot in the lee of the ice house, for the Christmas trading is the one social event of the long Northern winter. Indians and trappers mingled in the trading room, or sat about fires and talked of the weather, the fur catch, Berglund's approaching marriage, the murder of Sven, and of Red Shane, and speculated fearsomely upon the whereabouts of the mad trapper, Dufresne, and wondered whether or not he would suddenly show up again with his murderous axe.

Though young in years, Corporal Downey was wise in the ways of the northland. No one knew better than he, the rigors of the snow trail and the trapline, and no one realized better than he the depressing effect of long periods of isolation in the vast solitudes of the outlands. He knew that these people of the wilderness looked forward to the Christmas trading as a time of gaiety—a welcome and a necessary relaxation from the stern business of living. So it was that, soon after his arrival, he managed to get Berglund to one side and hint in an unofficial, roundabout way, that though it was prohibited territory, there would be no official notice taken of the cup that cheers, providing the cup did not inebriate. Reasonable hilarity—okay. Drunkenness—no! And Berglund passed the word to the trappers, each of whom thus automatically became an enforcement officer, quick to see that any erring brother's supply was cut off if he showed signs of intoxication—lest the supply of all be cut off. Bill Jessup, the trapper, voiced the concensus of opinion, when he said, "Downey's all right, boys—he savvies. He'll play the game, if we do. But if we go tryin' to put anything over on him, believe me, he kin git tough—an' I don't mean maybe!"

As Downey mingled with the people he noted that Louise Beatty, usually the life of any gathering, appeared downcast and listless, a grim, hopeless look had supplanted the wonted sparkle of her blue eyes, and the smile of her red lips was a forced smile—the smile of one whose heart was heavy. He noted, also, that Torg Berglund's pale fishy eyes dwelt upon her in bestial anticipation whenever she entered the trading room to mingle with the crowd.

Berglund, his own best customer for the alcohol and water, was as genial and

coarsely jocose as his saturnine nature permitted him to be, chaffing good-humoredly about the delay of the parson he had sent for from Riverton to officiate at the wedding. He promised a Gargantuan feast —a promise amply guaranteed by the carcasses of half a dozen moose and deer that hung from the rafters in the ice house.

On the second day after the officers' arrival, the Indian guide who had been dispatched for the parson, appeared with the tale of a broken sled-runner. He and the parson had encountered rough ice, had left the lake to cut across a point, some fifty miles to the southward, and the runner had hit a rock and smashed beyond possibility of repair. So the parson, not being much of a man on the trail, had elected to camp there while the guide went for another sled. He had expected to get one at Beatty's on the Poplar, only a few miles north of the point—but he found no one at home, and no sled, so he came on to Berglund's.

CORPORAL DOWNEY dispatched Constable Brink with the police outfit to accompany the guide back for the parson. They made good time on the wind-packed snow that covered the surface of the lake, being forced ashore only occasionally by huge pressure ridges, or fields of rough ice piled by the wind before the final freeze-up. It had been well after noon when they pulled out of Berglund's, and they camped that night some fifteen miles to the southward. They pushed on in the morning, with snow clouds lowering to the southeast. The wind rose, and at noon it started to snow, foreshortening visibility and slowing their progress perceptibly. It was after dark when they reached the point, and found the parson seated comfortably in the doorway of the little tent before a crackling spruce fire.

The man of God appeared greatly relieved at their arrival. "I am glad you finally got here," he said. "The wolves have given me much concern. I could see their eyes gleaming from the darkness beyond the firelight. I feared they would attack the tethered dogs, and that they might even attack me. I managed to waken at intervals during the two nights I have been alone, and feed the fire. I have heard that wild animals fear to approach a fire."

"Oui, de wolf she bad, dis year. Mus' be no caribou in de Nort'. Wan tam more, fas lak' dat—no caribou in de Nort', de wolf, she com' sout' to ketch de moose, de deer, de rabbit. But dey no ketch de mans. Mebbe-so eat de dog—but de wolf is 'fraid to keel de man. Eat um if he ees dead—but no will keel. Me, I'd got back queek if Tom Beatty had been home, but I had to go on to Berglun' Pos' for sled."

"You done all right to keep the fire goin', Parson," commended Brink. "The wolves is thick, this year, an' hungry, an' they might of jumped the dogs. But you better roll in now, an' get you a good night's sleep. Me an' the Injun'll tend the fire tonight. We're goin' to have tough goin' tomorrow, if this storm don't let up. You don't notice it here in the timber—but out there on the lake it's plenty owly."

CONSTABLE BRINK awoke and threw back the flap of his sleeping bag which he had laid in the doorway of the tent close beside the Indian's bed of blankets and robes so that both would be within easy arm's reach of the woodpile. The fire had died down, and as he tossed on more wood the flames shot up and revealed the air filled with powdery snow that swirled and eddied in the occasional down-draughts. Above the crackle and snap of the flaming spruce sounded the dull, steady roar of the wind. He glanced at his watch. It was four o'clock. He was about to withdraw into his bag for two or three hours' more sleep when a blur of motion beyond the fire caught his eye, and the next moment he sat stiffly erect, staring wide-eyed at the figure that had stepped within the circle of the firelight and advanced close to the fire. Pure

white from top to toe it stood and, raising a mittened hand, threw back the hood of a twill parka.

Brink's jaw dropped, and each separate hair of his head seemed to rise slowly on end as he stared in horror at the flaming red hair that showed distinctly through the snow-laden air. Then the figure glanced toward the tent, and Brink found himself staring straight into the eyes of Red Shane! It seemed an eternity that Brink sat there paralyzed by terror, gazing at that motionless, silent figure. Then a down-draught of air enveloped the figure in a swirl of smoke and powdered snow, and when Brink's eyes cleared the figure was gone—it had vanished as suddenly and as silently as it had appeared—vanished in a swirl of smoke and snow—dissolved into the howling night!

For long moments Brink sat striving vainly to penetrate the blackness beyond the circle of the firelight, his scalp atingle, little chills chasing themselves up and down his spine. He lay down, withdrew deep within his bag, and pulled the flap over his head. It was a dream. It was a trick of the storm—of the swirling snow, and the eddying smoke. Red Shane was dead! The wolves had eaten him—all but the bones he had brought back and turned over to Downey and the coroner. Red was dead—the coroner had said he was dead! Even if he wasn't dead, he wouldn't be wandering about in the bush in the night in the midst of a howling blizzard. He wouldn't—if he wasn't dead. But how about it if he was? Brink shuddered and his fists clenched in an agony of terror. Who said there were no ghosts? How do they know? Brink knew it was no dream. He had seen the figure as plainly as he had ever seen a living person—standing there silent, snow-white, except for that flaming red hair! It was Red Shane, beyond the possibility of a doubt—and Red Shane was dead! He, himself, had collected Red's bones — those of them that the wolves had left lying around in the trampled snow in Red's last camp, way back in the bush.

Was that what happened to men who die in the bush? That they must forever wander aimlessly about in the night—struggling through the snows of roaring blizzards, seeking the little warmth of campfire, only to vanish again into the

storm when the campfire was found? Or did they forever dog the footsteps of those they had reason to hate? Brink closed his eyes and tried to sleep. But sleep would not come, and two hours later when he heard the Indian moving about the fire, he threw back the flap of his sleeping bag, crawled out, and dressed.

The parson was awake, too, and in the presence of the two, Brink's terror subsided. He was a fool, he told himself. There were no ghosts. The figure he had seen beyond the fire had been merely a figure of his own imagination. Either that, or someone had appeared, and for some reason, had vanished again into the storm, and his imagination had made the figure look like Red Shane. Under pretense of collecting more wood, Brink ventured beyond the fire and examined the snow. There were no tracks—only the smooth spread of snow gleaming white in the firelight. He returned abruptly to the fire, and hurried the preparation for a start.

"We can harness both teams to the sled," he said. "The parson can ride, an' the Injun an' me'll change off between the dogs an' the tailrope. We can make good time, once we get on the ice. The wind'll be mostly at our backs, an' the snow on the open is packin' as it falls."

"Oui, de snow be good for sled, an' we got plent' good dog. But on de lake, we

no kin see. Mus' look out for not git los'."

"We can't get lost," Brink replied. "I've got a compass. We ain't got much of a load, even with the parson ridin'. Come on, let's get goin'. If we have good luck we might make Berglund's tonight."

THE storm petered out toward mid-morning, and with the eleven big dogs in fine fettle from their rest, the outfit made good time on the wind-packed snow, arriving at Berglund's at nine-thirty in the clear, moon-lit evening. Brink, at the tail-rope, looked furtively back over his shoulder a hundred times during the last fifteen miles of the journey, half-expecting, and altogether dreading to see a white figure with flaming red hair silently dogging his footsteps.

In the little tent, Corporal Downey kidded the younger man, as they retired for the night. "You sure made a good run today, Brink. But you look kind of white an' peaked—like you'd seen a ghost or somethin'."

Brink looked up quickly. "What d'you mean—a ghost?" he asked in a tone that caused the corporal to regard him closely. "There ain't no ghosts, is there, Downey?"

"I never seen any, myself," the other replied. "But lots of folks claim they have!"

"Well—I seen one!"

"What!"

"Sure I did. At four o'clock this mornin'. I woke up an' throw'd wood on the fire, an' then I seen it. Standing there lookin' at me acrost the fire—the ghost of Red Shane!"

"Pshaw," grinned Downey. "You was tired, or dreamin', or somethin'."

"I wasn't tired—an' neither I wasn't dreamin'. I seen it, I tell you! I seen it as plain as I see you right now! One minute it stood there—all white, except for the red hair where he'd shoved back the hood of his parka. An' then there come a swirl of smoke an' snow—an' it was gone!"

"Chances is, you was mistaken."

"But damn it—I wasn't mistaken! I couldn't of be'n! It stood there a hell of a while—lookin' right into my eyes!"

"I mean," grinned Downey, "about it's bein' Red's ghost. The chances is it was Red, himself. I've been kind of hopin' he'd show up. It would be a damn shame if Torg Berglund got old Tom Beatty's girl."

BRINK stared at the other in wide-eyed surprise. "What d'you mean—Red, himself? You crazy or what? Red's dead! Didn't I report his death? An' didn't I bring in his clothes, an'—"

"You reported his death all right," interrupted Downey. "An' you brought in his clothes. But lots of folks has be'n reported dead that ain't. An' a man don't have to be dead, just because some cop brings in his clothes."

"But — his bones! I brought in his bones!"

"Not Red Shane's bones, you didn't. Them bones you brought in was Dufresne's bones—not Red's."

"Dufresne's! Why—why—they couldn't of be'n! I followed Dufresne's trail from that camp clean to the railway. An' I couldn't be mistaken. I know Dufresne's tracks, an' the tracks of his dogs an' his sled.

"I followed him for two weeks till I lost the trail in that storm, dodgin' back an' forth, an' here an' there through the bush, after he murdered his wife an' kids. I couldn't be wrong on them tracks—I'd know 'em anywheres! An' besides," he added triumphantly, "didn't I locate his sled, an' his outfit, an' his dogs at the railway?"

"Oh, sure—you done all that, Brink. Them tracks you followed to the railway was Dufresne's tracks, an' the outfit you found there was Dufresne's outfit. The only thing you overlooked was the fact that Red Shane was wearin' Dufresne's moccasins an' drivin' Dufresne's dogs.

Funny you didn't notice that, Brink. I would."

"But," cried the astounded Brink, "how do you know? You never even seen them tracks!"

"I DIDN'T have to," replied Downey dryly. "I seen the bones. Then it was easy as A B C to dope out about the tracks."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, take them leg bones you brought in. I examined 'em close, an' neither one of 'em had ever be'n broke. Red Shane broke a leg last year, down at Gypsumville, and I helped set it. If a bone is once broke, you can always see the place where it mended."

Brink frowned. "How would I know his leg had be'n broke? You can't blame me for that."

"No—not fer that, Brink. But there was other things you'd ought to noticed—the teeth in that skull, for instance. Red Shane had big white teeth—the teeth in that skull was medium size, an' yellowish. Then there was the trail. You follered Dufresne's trail after he killed his wife an' kids an', like your report said, it wandered around an' doubled back an' forth through the bush—in fact, the trail of a crazy man without no objective, except to keep on the move. Yet accordin' to your report, the trail you followed from the camp where you found the bones, held straight to the southeast till it stopped at the railway. The man that made it was goin' like hell—just like Red Shane had be'n goin', an' in the same direction. On top of that, you ought to have doped it out that Dufresne, who had always lived back here in the bush, wouldn't hit for the railway an' get on a train. The chances are, he never seen a train. An' wouldn't know where to go if he got on one. Dufresne would have kept on doin' just what he started out to do—keep shovin' on through the bush, tryin' to hide.

"It's things like that, Brink, that a policeman's got to take heed of, if he's ever goin' to be worth a damn. It looks from here like you'd got your murderers all mixed up."

Brink scowled sulkily. "If that was Red an' not his ghost, then where is he? He's had plenty of time to get here, by now. He had a good three or four hours start of us—an' we got here."

"Mebbe his dogs was wore down, an' yours was fresh. Mebbe he stopped in at Beatty's, hopin' to find the girl there. I don't know where he's at. But accordin' to the plans here, the weddin' won't come off till tomorrow evenin'. I sure hope he gets here on time."

Chapter XI

Red Shane Returns

THE following day was a day of activity at Berglund's Post. In the entirely inadequate kitchen the wives of several trappers toiled at the cooking of vegetables, the making of pies, and the preparation of a huge pot of gravy, while outside their husbands, more or less ably assisted by a scattering of half-breeds and Indians, tended the wood fires and turned the improvised spits upon which were roasting the carcasses of moose and deer. Others moved the huge baling press to one side, carried the fur from the new loft to the old, and erected long tables and benches in anticipation of the evening's feast.

Business was suspended for the day, and in the trading room Torg judiciously dispensed his alcohol and water without charge, and attended to minor transactions involving actual necessities. Constable Brink sulked in the tent, nursing his feet, galled by the previous day's strenuous trip. In and about moved Corporal Downey, chatting with an Indian here, a trapper there, his finger on the pulse of the North.

Shortly after noon, a dog team swung in from the lake and drew up before the door, and without waiting to unharness,

the driver pushed into the trading room. He paused a moment as his glance swept the interior, and came to rest on Louise Beatty who was, at the moment, seated upon a box of goods talking to Corporal Downey. With mittens dangling at his sleeves, the newcomer reached up and threw back the hood of his parka. At sight of the flaming red hair, the dozen or more people in the room gasped and drew back, tensely. Louise Beatty stared for an instant straight into the man's eyes. Then, her two clenched fists drawn tight against her bosom, she screamed hysterically:

"Red! Red Shane! O—my God! You—you aren't dead!"

"No! But you—are you married?"

Behind the counter Torg Berglund's face twisted into a scowl of hate. "Not yet," he rasped, "but she will be, tonight—married to me!"

The man turned to the girl whose widened eyes had never left his face. "How about it, Louise? Do you want to marry him?"

"No!" she cried, her face paper-white. Then her voice broke as her glance shifted for a moment to the face of old Tom, who stood leaning against the counter. "I—I—must marry him! I—I've got to! Oh, Red—if you were not dead—why did you go away?"

"Shut up!" cried Berglund angrily. "He's nothin' to you! Yer my woman, now."

Red Shane advanced and glared across the counter at the man. The girl's scream had brought faces to the door of the kitchen. Some of the faces had disappeared as their owners dashed to the fires, and to the fur loft shouting the return of Red Shane. Men were crowding into the room, as Red spoke.

"She's not your woman—and she never will be. Thank God, I got here in time! I was in Winnipeg and I saw by the paper that a preacher had left Riverton to marry you and Louise. I burned up the snow to get to Beatty's. I was cutting across a point and saw a campfire. I thought I'd rest for a while, for I was tired. A man sat up in a sleeping bag. I saw it was Brink, so I pushed on to Beatty's, but when I got there they were gone. I was about all in, and so were my dogs, so I rested a while and then came on."

An evil leer played about Berglund's thin lips. "Yah—you got here in time fer the weddin'. Yer welcome, Red. I'll like fer you to see it, an' when it's over Corporal Downey'll be takin' you back to Winnipeg—an' in the spring, they'll hang you, there."

"What for?" The words ran like a pistol shot in the tense silence of the crowded room.

"For killin' Sven! Cold blooded murder—that's what it was!"

RED SHANE shrugged. "You ought to know," he said in a hard brittle voice.

"What d'you mean?"

"You killed him. I didn't."

"Ha! That's a laugh—what with folks right here in this room that heard you threaten to kill him. Does it stand to reason a man would kill his own brother?"

"Maybe not, *Engstrom,*" replied Red, his eyes on the cold, fishy eyes of the other. "But—you killed *Ole Jensen.*"

Corporal Downey noted that the pale cold eyes flickered, at the words, and in the subdued light of the trading room the face of the man behind the counter seemed suddenly to have assumed a pasty gray color. He moved closer, his eyes on the man's hands.

Red Shane continued. "You see, I hit for the railway after my run-in with Constable Brink. I knew I wouldn't have a chance in the world if Brink deputized you to take me to Norway House. So I beat it. Dufresne jumped me in the night with an axe—he'd have got me, too, if he hadn't tripped on a dog line. I had to shoot him. When I started I didn't know where I was going—except that I must get out of the

North, get away from anyone who knew me. I went like the devil, but at night I had plenty of time to think. I had the money you paid me for the fish in my pocket—but I didn't want to go. I was leaving the girl I loved, and everything I owned here in the North. I made up my mind to come back—as soon as I could figure a way to prove my innocence. It was while I was trying to figure things out, that I put two and two together.

"The first thing was that you two didn't look like brothers, nor act like brothers, nor talk like brothers; you both had an accent—but the accents were different. The other thing was 'Osakis'." The man behind the counter winced at the name, and Red continued. "I happened to overhear you and the man you called Sven quarreling in the storeroom when I came in for gas to take the Beattys home. I learned that you both were purposely overloading Tom Beatty with debt in the hope that he'd persuade Louise to marry you—only neither one knew that the other had the same thought in mind. When you found it out, you quarreled. Sven was afraid of you—and he had good reason to be. I heard you threaten him, and tell him that if it hadn't been for you showing him how to make a stake, he'd be back in Osakis playing baseball for fifty dollars a month. And when he said he wished he was there, and had never let you talk him into throwing in with you, you shut him up, before he had a chance to mention the scheme. So in the night by the campfire, I remembered that conversation, and I decided to go to Osakis—wherever Osakis was."

RED turned from the man behind the counter, whose fishy eyes were staring glassily from the pasty face, to Corporal Downey, who, without removing his eyes from the man's hands, nodded for him to go on.

"It took me a lot of time in the public library at Grand Forks, pouring over maps, to find out that Osakis was in Minnesota. Nice town—Osakis. Nice lake for wall-eyes, and bass, and pike. I stayed there about a week, and I found out a lot of things—some of 'em jibed; and some didn't. The first thing I saw when I got off the train was a sign: 'Berglund Lumber Company,' it said. I inquired of the station agent, and he told me that the two Berglund brothers, Torg and Sven, had sold out the business three years ago this winter, and had gone to Canada. That jibed, to a T. He told me that Torg, the elder brother was somewhere in the forties, and Sven, the younger, was in his late twenties. Torg was tall and rather slender; Sven was full faced, and stouter. That jibed, too.

"I asked a lot of questions of different people and found out that the Berglunds were fine men, both of them—well-liked, and highly respected public citizens. That didn't jibe, so well. Then I asked if Sven had been a good ball player, I found out that he never played ball at all.

"The boys in the barber shop laughed when I said that I understood Sven used to play ball for fifty dollars a month. That didn't jibe, either. At the bank I learned that the Berglunds had sold out for cash, and had taken the money with them—some fifty thousand dollars. I got photographs of the Berglunds from the local photographer, and they helped a lot—in a negative way.

"It was in the barber shop that I got a real break. I happened to see a photograph tacked on the wall—it was the photograph of a baseball team in uniform, with OSAKIS across their breasts. When I walked over

and looked at it closely, I got a big thrill. The face of one of the players was familiar—mighty familiar to me. I asked about the team, in a manner meant to be casual, and the local sports, of whom Donart, the barber, was the most voluble, started in to brag about the prowess of that team. Four years ago it was—Osakis never lost a game that year. They beat Sauk Centre, and Alexandria, and Long Prairie, and even St. Cloud. The team sort of broke up when Ole Jensen left, they said. He had been the only paid player—the pitcher—they paid him fifty a month. No one knew where he went, just drifted away. He wasn't a local boy, worked for Berglunds in the lumber yard—him and Carl Engstrom. They roomed together over Caughren's store, and when Berglunds sold out, they drifted away. Didn't stay to work for the new owners. I asked about Engstrom; he was older—sort of a sour Swede, with a cold, fishy eye—no one seemed to like him. Funny a guy like Ole Jensen would pal around with him, but he did. I was lucky in finding a photo of Engstrom—driving a big load of lumber in a Fourth of July parade and his face was familiar, too.

"I LEARNED from the banker, that neither of the Berglunds had married. He said he often wondered what had become of them—why they hadn't written—especially Torg, who had been a particular friend of his. He had received one letter from him, which he showed me, written on hotel paper from Winnipeg a month after they had left, in which he had said that they were considering the purchase of a lumber and coal business in Portage la Prairie, west of Winnipeg. Torg said in the letter that he'd write again when he had something definite to tell—and that was the last he ever heard from either one of them.

"I went to Winnipeg. I was half afraid to go, afraid that my ruse of changing outfits with Dufresne hadn't worked, and that the police of all Canada would be on the lookout for me. But I had to go. I knew that something was wrong, somewhere—damn good and wrong—and I knew that if I was ever to come back here to Louise, I had to find out what it was. In Winnipeg I got another break. I read of my own death in the newspaper, the day I got there. I had murdered a trader, and in turn, had been murdered by an insane trapper—there was even an editorial about the grim and terrible justice of the silent North! I breathed easier, then; I was wearing store clothing, and using an assumed name.

"At the hotel I found that the Berglunds had stayed there for three weeks, three years ago in December, and had checked out. They had left no address. I made a round of all the banks but none of their records showed any deposits by a Berglund during that fall or winter. It looked like a stalemate. I couldn't find the name of either Engstrom or Jensen on any hotel register for the period. So I went to Portage la Prairie and found a lumber dealer, who told me that he had practically sold out to a couple of brothers named Berglund, three years before. They had agreed to pay cash for the business, but had never returned, and he had never heard from them since. There was a funny thing, he said, happened near Gervais, a town that lay between there and Winnipeg. On the day the Berglunds had agreed to return from Winnipeg, pay over the money and take over the business, a couple of men were found dead in a hired wagon stuck in a snowdrift beside the road. The Winnipeg paper printed a picture of the two, and they looked a good deal like the Berglunds, but they weren't, because they identified the men as a couple of fellows who lived in a rooming house in Winnipeg. A funny coincidence, the lumberman thought—but newspaper pictures hardly ever look like the people they're supposed to be, anyhow. He'd probably never connected the Berglunds with the pictures, if

they hadn't disappeared just at that time.

"So I went to Gervais and talked to the coroner. He remembered the incident, looked up his records, and told me that the men had been identified by papers in their pockets, as Carl Engstrom and Ole Jensen, who lived in a rooming house in Winnipeg. The landlady there said the two had taken a room in her house about three weeks before, and had told her they were from Minneapolis. But the Minneapolis authorities failed to locate any relatives, and the men were buried there in Gervais.

"NEXT I went to Winnipeg for I thought I had enough to talk to the police. The deaths had occurred outside the city, so I went to the Headquarters of D Division of the Mounted. I saw a couple of constables there I knew by sight, but they never gave me a second glance, dressed as I was, and presently I was shown into Inspector Darwin's office. He's a fine man. I'd never seen him before, but when we were alone in the office, he leaned back in his chair and looked at me for what seemed a long time. I was getting kind of nervous, wondering if he guessed who I really was, when he spoke up. 'So you're Red Shane, eh?' You could have knocked me down with a feather!"

A slight grin flickered at the corners of Downey's lips. "Yeah," he agreed dryly. "But it ain't so surprisin' as you think—if the constables had be'n smart enough to spot you, chances is, they'd have be'n inspectors, an' Darwin a constable. Go on."

"Well, I admitted it, of course, and he nodded. 'Yes, I took Constable Brink's report over the telephone about your murdering Sven Berglund, and then being murdered by a crazy trapper, and your body eaten by wolves. I note,' he added, 'that the report was somewhat inaccurate, as Brink's reports are apt to be. Suppose you go ahead and tell me all about it.'

"I talked for an hour or more, and as he listened I don't believe his eyes ever left my face—and not once did he interrupt by so much as a word. When I had finished, he took me into the superintendent's office, and I told the whole story to him—starting clear back from the time Torg Berglund told Louise to carry the light out to the end of the point. When I had finished, the superintendent turned to the inspector. 'Send a man to Gervais and check those deaths. Two bodies found frozen in a drift were so obvious that the coroner probably never even made an examination. Better have someone ask that landlady on Benzie Street if she knew of those two lodgers of hers ever having any poison on hand. Whether she did, or not, better check the poison records of all drug stores during the time those men were here. The chances are, that if any purchase was made, the purchaser signed his right name and address so if the druggist was suspicious he could check by phone. If poison was purchased, we'll go ahead and get an order to exhume those bodies.'

"We returned to the inspector's office and he gave the necessary orders. When the men had gone, I told the inspector I suppose he'd have to lock me up until the case was cleared up.

"Again I got the surprise of my life. 'No,' he said, with a smile, 'I've got good reasons to believe you've told the truth. Your story checks with some things I happen to know—and no one could tell me as long a lie as that without leaving holes in it that you could throw a dog through—and besides, it would be a shame to lock up as good a detective as you. You can go now. Drop around in the morning and we'll see what my men have found out.'

"Believe me, I was sure relieved—but for the life of me, I can't see what he could have known that prevented him from locking me up for Sven's murder."

AGAIN the smile flickered at the corners of Downey's lips. "Mebbe it was somethin' I said in the confidential report I sent down by the coroner, after I seen

them bones. You see, I never figured you killed Sven, from the first. But go on—what's the rest of it"

"Well, I went back next morning and found out that the man who talked to the landlady said that Engstrom had bought some arsenic to kill rats in her cellar with. She told the officer that he had bought it at the drugstore on the corner, and the druggist had called her up to know if it was okay. The inspector told me that the order for exhumation of the bodies had been issued, and that the police were right then at work digging them up. He said he was sure glad Engstrom had bought arsenic; if he had used cyanide it would probably be too late to find any trace in the bodies—but arsenic would show up, no matter how long they had been dead.

"The police returned in the afternoon and turned parts of the bodies over to the chemist for analysis. The inspector said it might be several days before we got the report, so I went back to the hotel, and that evening I read in the paper of the preacher leaving Riverton for here. I called up the inspector and told him about it, and—and" Red's voice faltered for a moment and he continued. "Gosh! He's a fine man! He got busy and turned over a team of dogs to me and a sled, and ordered a constable to haul the outfit to the lake in a truck right then, so I could get an early start in the morning. He even offered to detail a constable to go with me, but I told him I didn't need one—that I was used to winter trailing. He laughed and said that he was glad to find that out, at least one part of Constable Brink's report was correct anyhow. He told me that just the minute they got the chemist's report, if arsenic was found in the bodies, he would hit out for Berglund's himself."

HARDLY had Red ceased speaking before the door opened and a man in the winter uniform of the Mounted Police stepped into the room, and pushed his way through the crowd which had been listening in breathless silence.

"Hello, Downey!" he said, and pointed to Berglund who had stood as one in a trance throughout the whole recital. "This is really your job—arrest that man!" Then he cried sharply, "Look out!"

As Corporal Downey turned to greet the inspector, the figure behind the counter galvanized into action. Like a flash his hand had shot under the counter, and come up with a revolver. There was a surge of motion as the crowd which had edged in close, struggled and fought to get out of the way of the menacing weapon. Downey reached for his own gun, but before he could draw it, Red Shane's hand reached out and closed about an iron scale weight which he hurled just as the muzzle of the gun came to rest almost against his chest. There was a dull thud as the weight struck Engstrom's forehead and bounced onto a shelf behind him smashing some lamp chimneys, fragments of which fell in a tinkling shower about the man who had dropped like a poled ox.

Pandemonium reigned in the room until the officers succeeded in restoring order. Engstrom was revived, handcuffed, and seated in a chair. Corporal Downey stood before him. "You're under arrest, Engstrom, for the murder of the Berglunds. It's my duty to warn you that anything you say may be used against you. But you might as well come clean — we've got enough on you to convict you, no matter whether you talk, or not."

The pale fish-like eyes stared, cold as ice, into the officer's face. The thin lips twisted into a sneer. "Go to hell!" he snarled. "I killed 'em. What matter? You'll hang me—that's all. I made Jensen come in with me—made him steal money from Berglund's safe one time, so he wouldn't dare to back out."

"Why did you kill 'em?"

"Money—that's why. They was rich. I was poor. I had as much right to have money as they did—if I was smart enough

to git it. We used most of it to buy this post from McTavish. The rest's in the safe."

DOWNEY eyed the man in disgust. "It looks like you botched the job, Engstrom," he said. "If you'd have allowed them bodies to be identified as the Berglunds, after you poisoned 'em, Red Shane could never have run you down. You already had their money."

"Yah, know-it-all—well, we wanted more—see? I know'd Torg had money in a bank in St. Paul, an' I've be'n practicin' up tryin' to write like him so I could draw it out. But I never had the chance to try it. Besides, me an' Ole could die an' no one would give a damn. But if Berglunds died, that might start somethin'. Plenty of folks know'd they had money, an' we'd be'n seen with 'em. We follered 'em to Winnipeg an' they promised us jobs in their new lumber yard. When Torg told me to hire a car fer that trip to Portage la Prairie, I hired it in my name so they couldn't trace it to Berglunds. On the way we had sandwiches an' beer—only their sandwiches was loaded with arsenic."

"But why did you kill Jensen?"

"Plenty reasons. He know'd too much. He talked too much when he'd git oiled. He had insurance that I'd git when he died. He'd made his will leavin' his property to me. He wanted the girl. I was afraid that if I got her, he'd git mad an' talk. Red Shane wanted her, too. She liked Red. If I could make it look like Red killed Ole, then they'd hang Red, an' I'd be rid of 'em both. Things went wrong—that's all. I lose. Go ahead an' hang me—*an' damn you all!*"

Later, Inspector Martin strolled over to where Red Shane was talking to the girl who was looking up into his face with sparkling eyes. "How about a wedding here tonight? The parson came a long way. It would be a shame to disappoint him."

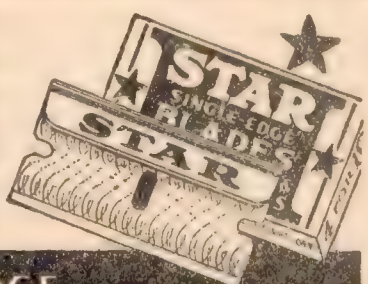
The girl smiled happily. "We were just wondering if we couldn't be married—but we haven't got a license."

The inspector grinned, and cleared his throat.

"Well—if you'll both promise not to have me indicted for forgery, I might take a chance on altering the license the parson brought with him. I can do some explaining when I get back to Winnipeg. And by the way, Miss Beatty — after you're married, why don't you try to persuade that husband of yours to join on with the police? We don't take married men as a rule, but there are exceptions to all rules. With only a chance word or two to go on, he cleared up a couple of murders that came mighty near being the much talked of perfect crime. We need young men with brains in the service. Got some of the other kind now," he added, with a glance at Constable Brink, who had been a scowling listener. "Not many—but a few."

"DICK" MERRILL'S STAR PERFORMANCE

Eastern Air Lines' ace pilot made the first non-stop flight from London to Floyd Bennett Field in 24 hours, 20 minutes! Another Star Performance is the way whiskers fly with Star Single-edge Blades! Star Blade Division, Bklyn., N. Y.



STAR SINGLE-EDGE BLADES 4 FOR 10¢
FOR GEM AND EVER-READY RAZORS

25

Queer Language They Talk in the Legion—But It Gets Results

THE CAP OF MY UNCLE

By ROBERT CARSE

Author of "The Flame," "Call to Arms," etc.

SNOW had drifted yards deep in places on that slope, but now at noon the Moroccan sun was brilliant. Joe Tawn worked stripped to the waist, his great back muscles smoothly flexed as he swung the double-headed axe. His job was on a tall spruce. The rest of the detail moved in the usual methodical Legion manner, stacking the trimmed logs to be carried to the post. Beyond them, in full enjoyment of his sergeant's stripes and command, Gerry sat on a stump and watched Tawn.

Each stroke of the axe was clear and sure in Tawn's hands. The chips flew spinning back from the bite of the blade, thickly covered the snow. There was real wood chopping, Gerry thought. That was how an American who really knew an axe went at a tree. He straightened to pick up his automatic rifle and call at the others, for the spruce was about to fall.

Tawn took a final blow and turned grinning. She's a-goin', Sergeant," he said. "That there should hold the boys till spring."

Gerry did not answer. The spruce was reeling in wide sweeps, groaning in its fall. But up the slope there was another sound. Men were in among the snow-clotted brush, Chleuh warriors who knelt to shoot. Their Mausers gave a vibrant clanging in the valley. Then Gerry yelled and his men went running for their stacked rifles.

The Chleuh sprang agilely over the snow. They did not use their Mausers any more, had taken the long knives from

their belts. Gerry got one burst from the automatic before they were around him. He saw dark eyes, darker faces, and the high, bright blur of the knives reaching very close. He tried to jump back so that he could be free to fire, tripped almost flat. The breath was gone from him; he fumbled vaguely at the automatic.

Then broad, khaki-wrapped legs were before him. He heard a shout that was sheer exultant laughter. Joe Tawn owned those legs, Gerry realized. Tawn was in front of him with the axe. . . .

It was rather terrible, the way the Chleuh tried to get away. They couldn't stand against the axe. One or two of them, fiercer than the rest, came right on toward it. Tawn killed them in open stride. He whirled the axe shoulder-high, moving all the time. Gerry had to call out to stop him.

The Chleuh were dead or in flight. The men of the detail picked off the loping figures one by one with separate shots. Tawn lowered the axe and slicked the blades through clean snow. He grinned when he found Gerry's glance on him. "Guess," he said, "they might ha' stayed up there where they was first. But then you'd given them hell a-plenty with your piece."

"Sure," Gerry said tight-voiced. "They had the right idea—except for you and the axe."

JOE TAWN lifted the axe, hefted it in his hand. "She's a dandy," he said. "You want that I should trim up them branches on the spruce?"

In a slow, acrid flow of French and English, Gerry cursed. "No," he muttered, not trusting himself to say any more. The one private boast he had ever made, he remembered, was that he had seen too much soldiering and death to be surprised again by anything. But in all his years he had never seen a man like this. Joe Tawn stood here now as though he was back on his daddy's wood lot in Missouri. You had to look at the blood on his trousers and the axe helve so you wouldn't mistake him for any farmer boy. He breathed evenly, the pale blue eyes were calm, and his hair was touseled like a bunch of corn shucks. "Yuh mean," he asked, "we're knockin' off for today?"

Gerry could laugh then. "That's right," he said. "You are. You ain't been but eight months in the outfit, but you're going to be a corporal after this. Battalion hears about it, you'll likely catch yourself a medal. Now go get your stuff and come on in with me. I want to send a report down to the major quick."

The post there at Tlemenin was an isolated one, and Gerry as commander of eighteen men had a room to himself. It was built of rough, undressed stone, but he had a big fireplace at one end and a line of bottles and books all along one wall. He piled the fire up high before he sat to write his report. Joe Tawn hunkered on the floor beside the fire. "Yuh mind, Sergeant," he asked finally, "if I bring my dog in here? It's most supper time, and those other fellas don't watch out for him."

"Bring him," Gerry snapped. "But don't you stay too long at supper. I got stuff to talk with you. You ain't to be just a dumb soldier any more. A corporal's stripes make a man different in this outfit."

He was through with the report, was pouring a cup full of rum when Joe Tawn came back with the dog. The dog had been playing in the muddied snow of the courtyard, began to shake at once. Great brownish gouts splattered the pages of Gerry's reports. He rose reaching for an empty bottle, but Joe Tawn spoke fast. "Now don't take on, Sarge," he said. "Bessef's a good dog. He didn't know he was doin' harm."

"Bessef," Gerry said in a rasping voice. "What the hell do you mean, 'Bessef'? Where'd you get such a rat, and such a name?"

Joe Tawn had taken Bessef by the col-

lar. He stroked a hand down the narrow-eyed, pointed head and the scrawny back. "Down at the base at Bel-Abbes," he said. "Best dog around there, but none of them other soldiers seemed t' want him. Told me, though, that Bessef means 'plenty' in Arab lingo, and this here dog's plenty smart."

Gerry took recourse to the rum, drank deep. "You're sure a picture," he said. "Something right off the wall. Now let that damn' dog be and listen to me. Tell me straight how you come to get in to the Legion. I want to have it for the major, and I want to know it myself."

JOE TAWN followed. "Ain't much to tell," he said. "I just got me the itchin' foot, there one day in Missouri. Went over to the river, and there's a fella with a boat goin' to New Orleans. Got off there, and got on another boat. That one come out here somewheres, place name of St. Nazaire."

"Then you got drunk," Gerry said.

"No, I ain't a drinkin' man. But a fella on the boat, he read me a piece out of a magazine about th' Foreign Legion. It was a right nice life, the way the piece said. So I got to thinkin' maybe that would be pretty good, and better than them boats, because I was seasick all the time. So I meet a French fella who speaks our way, and he shows me where to join the Legion. But they sure drilled the tail offen me at Bel-Abbes before I come up here."

"What real name you got?" Gerry said. "It ain't just Joe Tawn. Your folks ever call you Joseph?"

"Never to hear them tell."

Gerry made the rum cup jump as he hit the table. He got up and glared at Joe Tawn. "Listen to me, you jug-head!" he said, almost roaring. "It ain't always been there's two Americans in the same outfit in the Legion, and both of them good soldiers. And I aim to make a real soldier out of you if I have to pour sense into your skull with a funnel. You got to talk sense from here. You got to learn to read and speak French, and not the kind of monkey gibberish you talk now. Can you read the stuff, just a little bit?"

"No," Joe Tawn said. "Not more'n some few words."

Gerry grasped the bottle, refilled the cup. Then he crossed the room and pulled a worn book from the pile along the wall. "Here," he said. "Get going quick. You'll never last as a corporal in this outfit, if you can't read French. This is a grammar, and the guys who wrote it made it simple enough for mopes like you. Let go that dog and study it. Two hours, and I'll ask you what you know."

Joe Tawn shook his head and tried to grin. "I took a crack at it down at Bel-Abbes, Sarge," he said. "But what the hell kind of language is it where yuh got to say, 'This is the cap of my uncle'? That just don't make straight sense."

"It's the way the Frogs make sense," Gerry said, grimly and very slow. "Take the book! And hold it right side up!"

SWEAT came on Joe Tawn's brow during those two hours. He mumbled words half aloud as he read, repeatedly glanced from the book at Gerry. But the sergeant was slouched in a corner with the rum bottle, and all he watched was his wristwatch dial. "You can't," Joe Tawn ventured, "give me until t'morra, Sarge? I ain't ever been a fit student with a book."

Gerry nearly strangled on a mouthful of rum. He gargled it down and for a moment more sat silent. While he had

waited, the fire's heat and the action of the rum had brought him to a pleasant, reflective state. He saw his past in the Legion as an unbroken and gloriously heroic panorama where no hardships counted. He recalled the victories in which he had shared, the day Abd el Krim, leader of one of the greatest native armies of history, had ridden in on his white horse to surrender, and the ringing words Lyauety and Rollet, all the generals, had found in praise of the Legion.

The Legion was his life, he recognized. Very little outside of it mattered any more. But his time would be up soon, and they'd have him for retirement. He'd been lucky to find this fine, strapping lad, another American he could make into a soldier as good as he was, to leave behind him as a proud legacy to the regiments. He looked up now, squarely, yet with an odd kind of wistful hope. "Joey," he said, "there's no time left for foolin'. You're to be the new corporal around here. Not one of them yah-yah Germans out there. So let's see what you've learned. Take a look at this."

He staggered slightly as he got up and went to the table. But what he wrote was legible and in clear military French. Then he read it slowly to Joe Tawn:

"Post being attacked in great numbers. Immediate aid needed. Send all possible men."

"Yuh spoke it pretty fast," Joe Tawn said. "Could yuh hint a little what it means?"

"Read it again, yourself," Gerry said, carefully restraining the rise of his anger. "Suppose you was commanding here, and that was to come from the post at Ait-Maoun. Or suppose the sergeant there was to get it from me. What'd be the reply?" He moved away from the table then and faced the fire. He couldn't go on looking at Joe Tawn.

Joe Tawn had drawn the pen and a fresh piece of paper and the grammar to him. He held the pen as if it was a knife and he was cutting through tough leather. Sweat drops were in his eyes and he blinked them out, scratched Bessef's head and his own. He was a little bit afraid for the first time in his life, he knew. The gaunt, straight old man by the fire frightened him, and this book with the funny words. But he had to write; something in French must go down here on paper.

He spoiled four sheets of paper before he called to Gerry. "Here she is," he said. "This is what I'd send."

The sheet was unsteady in Gerry's hands. There were words slanted on it, some of them more than an inch high. In between were weird whorls and blobs, signs that might have been hieroglyphics. The words were: *"Le kepi de mon oncle. Vite! Vite!"*

Gerry said them in French, then English. "The cap of my uncle. Quick! Quick!" His face had gone pale. He ripped the sheet again and again, flung the fragments wide.

"It's wrong?" Joe Tawn said.

Gerry did not seem to have heard him. His eyelids had lowered, and he had half crouched. "Why," he asked, "after that other stuff, did you write *'Vite! Vite!'?"*

A rush of uncontrollable nervous laughter came from Joe Tawn. "Ain't that," he said, "what a Legion non-com always says?"

GERRY took stiff-legged strides around the table. He stared at Joe Tawn with the concentration of absolute rage. He did not see Bessef; when he trod on the dog his hobnails cut deep. Bessef part snarled, part whimpered. Gerry kicked him hard. "Get out, you rat!" he said.

"My dog ain't a rat," Joe Tawn said carefully. "And gold stripes don't give you no right to kick him around."

"Answer me," Gerry said. "Just answer me this. Don't you like the Legion? Ain't a chance at being non-com here better than chasing a plow in Missouri?"

Joe Tawn looked at Bessef. "I can't speak for sure," he said. "You been fine with me since I been here. I like a lot of the fellas; some of them Germans sing real well. But I've found me better food, and drawn better pay. And you done wrong to boot Bessef."

Gerry hit him then, knocked him right off the chair. Joe Tawn landed on his hands and knees. He rose dazed and surprised and Gerry struck him again. That time he stayed down for quite a while. When he got up he came in a straight charge, both big hands swinging.

It was like the Chleuh there with the axe, Gerry thought dimly once as he was flung against the wall. You just couldn't get away. But he was still tough enough to take this boy. The job was not to whip him so badly you broke his pride. He pushed from the wall as Joe Tawn charged once more. "Cut it out, Joey," he mumbled. "This can make a lot of trouble for you and—" The uppercut took him clear from his feet. Consciousness snapped blackly out in his brain.

Joe Tawn knelt beside him for many minutes. He bathed Gerry's head with water, pried loose the locked teeth and poured in rum. But the rigidity of the body did not change; the faint, fitful breathing was the same. The sergeant would be out for a long time, for hours, he realized. And at midnight Fleig, the senior corporal, would be down off the wall to call the sergeant to take over the guard. It was almost midnight now—

Joe Tawn straightened and looked around the room. One of his original lessons at recruit school at Sidi-bel-Abbes had been what happened to a common soldier when he struck a sergeant of the Legion. Men went to military prison for that. They hauled sand and broke stone half naked in the terrible coastal sun. Then, if they were lucky, they went back to their regiments and started once more to finish their regular time.

He didn't want any piece of that, Joe Tawn thought. This hadn't been his fight. The sergeant had been drunk, and the sergeant had booted his dog. Still, he could go to prison for the one simple fact that the sergeant had been struck.

The recognition wasn't clear to Joe Tawn until he had filled the canteen, taken the cartridge belt and carbine off the wall. He was going to make a break for it, go over the hill. He wouldn't be here when Fleig came. There was no use gambling it. The Legion style was just that way, and that was all. The sergeant would have to discipline him, fair, square or hold your nose. So he'd just as leave have the sergeant's sheepskin coat now, and he could use his kepi. There wasn't any chance to get over to the barracks for his own stuff. And when he went out the gate, Fleig and the rest of the guard would have to mistake him for the sergeant in the dark.

THE sheepskin coat was snug and he felt better when he had it on. But the stiff black kepi was too big for him, slid over his ears. He pulled the chin strap down to hold it, lifted up the carbine and the canteen. Then he looked around. The sergeant lay as before, the blood drying dark on his face. "So long, fella," Joe Tawn whispered, vaguely remembering a line he had heard a comedian say on the radio. "I guess maybe I won't be seein' yuh."

Bessef rested before the door. His nearly hairless tail and his concave body swayed from side to side. Joe Tawn was caught by sudden and profound emotion. It was his temptation to weep. For the first time he acutely realized what he was doing and what had just happened. He could never come back once he left this place, he thought. Deserters weren't a bunch of fellas they gave a special Sunday dinner to in the Legion. If he was caught leaving here, he'd be shot. If the Chleuh caught him he'd very probably be tortured to death. And any way it fig-

ured, he couldn't take Bessef. Not in this snow, and Bessef with that bum leg where the sergeant had stepped. "Be still, yuh rascal," he said and ran his hand down Bessef's back. Then he moved swiftly out and shut the door before Bessef began to bark.

No one heard Bessef. No one seemed to hear him either as he walked into the shadow of the main gate arch. He gently moved the huge bar and the chains, tugged the gate behind him. That made a dull sound and he was challenged from the wall. He cursed, using all the words the sergeant did. "Shut the gate, Fleig!" he snapped. "Shut the gate!" He went forward as he spoke, out of shadow into sheer starlight. But his back was to the post. He did not look around until he had crossed the first ridge to the south. Then clouds banked the stars and he could no longer see the post.

THE Chleuh caught him the next afternoon. That was in a valley about twenty kilometers south of the post, and the tribesmen blocked him on every side. He was very tired, stupid with fatigue. When his last rounds for the carbine were gone he got up and walked directly toward the nearest group.

A young warrior in a costly robe and carefully rolled turban commanded the group. He held the others back and addressed Joe Tawn in French. "What are you doing wearing that kepi and coat? You're not the sergeant from Tlemenin."

Joe Tawn stared hard at him. This man, he thought, must have been in the raid on the wood cutting detail, and one of the few who survived it. "No," he said, "not the sergeant. But the cap and coat of the sergeant."

He was very surprised as they laughed. He had hoped they would kill him at once, jump him with the long knives. But the young leader seemed very gay, was calling the other warriors out from behind the rocks. For a time they talked in their own tongue, then the leader said to him, "You have deserted?"

"That's right," Joe Tawn said.

"You stole the sergeant's cap and coat?"

"That's right."

"Why?"

Anger based in impatience began to flood through Joe Tawn. "What's it mean to you?" he said hoarsely.

The Chleuh tapped his chest above his silver-mounted cartridge belts. "Another deserter," he said. "Abd el Hamidu, corporal once in the Fifth Moroccan Tirailleurs." He laughed and jerked at the kepi. "Give me the cap and coat, slob. I'm chief here."

They took nearly everything from him then, his blouse and shirt and puttees, even his boots. "You had a fight with your sergeant," the man named Hamidu said. "You must have beaten hell out of him or you wouldn't be here. True?"

"Sure," Joe Tawn said.

Hamidu laughed again, but this time there was no merriment in the sound. "We'll let you live for a while," he said. "We'll show you something you would have missed in the penal battalions."

They started marching then, holding a compact single line. Joe Tawn went behind Hamidu. His arms had been bound high against his back in a position that made him want to scream. But slowly a numbness passed through all his body from his feet. He no longer felt the stabbing ache of the pain in his arms, and although his ankles were chafed raw by the crusted snow they seemed to have lost any sensation. He just went on, one stride after the other, unable to think, unable to care any longer about life or death.

It was gray dark when they reached the Chleuh *kasbah* high on a mountain side. He gazed about him blankly at the bleak stone-walled houses and the hard-faced women and old men. Then he was pitched through a doorway and his only knowledge was that he lay on straw and there was a fire somewhere near.

Hamidu awoke him, prodded him with a pointed stick. "Get up," Hamidu said. "This is a woman's house. She lost her man in that fight at Tlemenin, and you're going to work for her."

Joe Tawn could not speak. Pain lifted from his legs and strangled him. He stumbled sidewise and Hamidu hit him with the stick. "Not like that," Hamidu told him. "No. The Legion is famous for building wall. So now you carry stone, and in the spring you build wall. If you carry enough stone today, tonight you eat. You'd like to eat?"

THE stone was in the shallow river at the bottom of the valley. Joe Tawn carried it in a kind of huge leather sack, braced with a strap against his brow. He waded shoulder-deep in the river for some of the stones. Yet his clothing dried from the bodily heat of his exertion as he climbed back to the *kasbah*. There was always someone on the trail to watch him and keep him at a shuffling run. Usually it was Hamidu or one of the other warriors, but once in a while it was the woman for whom he carried the stones.

She fed him that night, as Hamidu had said he would be fed. He ate with both hands plunged in the bowl, choking down the stew of mutton and raisins and olives. The food brought a sort of appeasement, a calm from the pain. He looked across at her. She was tall, he saw, and young, as strong as any man. She wore simple cotton clothing and there was a knife in her belt. "Enough?" she asked him, and made a sign with her hand.

"Enough," he said. For her, he thought, it was like feeding a mule or any beast. Without food, he couldn't carry the stone. But she hated him; it was in her black eyes and the lines of her mouth, the way she spoke. He was of them who'd killed her man; maybe her man had been one who felt the axe. Then, glancing past her, he noticed the silver-leafed rifle and the kepi that hung above it on the wall. That was the sergeant's kepi, and Hamidu had carried it yesterday. "Yours, now?" he asked.

She sat still and quite rigid. The words she finally said were part in French, the rest coarse dialect of the kind the Legion

used. "My father was the *kaid* here. His gun was brought to me after his death. Hamidu gave me the cap because he has taken my father's place. But now do not speak to me—ever. Your place to sleep is there in the corner. You carry the stone. That is all."

Joe Tawn smiled at her, his face greasy with the stew. Her hate was pretty bad, he told himself, worse than the men's. But he could break it. He'd break it by his silence and the way he carried the stone.

He got up and went to the corner, heaped the straw and slept. For a short time he dreamed. In the dream he had a whip and before him Hamidu rolled a great stone on his hands and knees, pushing with his head.

HE forgot the dream in the night, but it returned during the following weeks. It snowed then; gale followed gale. Hamidu came to call him every morning, drove him to the river. He had to butt a path through the drifts with his body, and when he slipped carrying the loaded sack Hamidu beat him about the head and face. He understood at last what Hamidu wanted. If he took one close step, if he once raised his voice, Hamidu would slit him swiftly with the knife.

It was the woman who stopped Hamidu. She met him outside the house where Joe Tawn piled the stone. She spoke to Hamidu very fast and low in the Chleuh dialect, and Tawn could not get a word. But he could tell by the woman's voice and gestures that she was ordering Hamidu to let him be. He worked for her, she was saying, and not for anybody else. If he kept on getting beaten, he couldn't work at all.

Hamidu answered a couple of sentences. Then he went away, his face haggard with rage, the heavy stick broken into pieces in his hands. The woman's eyes warmed as she watched Hamidu. She motioned to Joe Tawn to go into the house, and put food out for him although it was only noon.

Joe Tawn had time to think, get his memory clear after that. He never touched the woman or tried to get close to her. Once in a while when his work was done and she gave him supper they talked, but there was little for them to say to each other. Maybe it was too bad, Joe Tawn thought. If things were different, he could like this woman fine, stay here quite a time. She had a right nice olive orchard down the hill, and a fair piece of maize patch up in back. But this wasn't his place and his people, and the woman knew that, too. Where he belonged was back with the Legion, if he belonged anywhere. In the spring when the snow was out he'd build the woman a solid wall for her maize patch and a shelter for her cow and goats. Then he'd make a try for Tlemenin. He missed Bessef one whole hell of a lot, and he missed Gerry. They could holler at him all they wanted for being a deserter, but he would have a chance to see his dog again, talk to Gerry and tell him anyhow why he'd gone over the hill. When you called a man a deserter you called him yellow, and he wasn't that.

Rains came late in March, and the snow stayed only in the high places out of the sun. Joe Tawn began to trim and sort his stone, start the wall. The woman watched him part of the time, and some of the warriors. But he didn't pay any attention to them. He was thinking of the Legion, thinking of getting back.

THE first really warm night the woman left the door a little open and he couldn't sleep. A moon was up that filled the valley, let a green slit of light into the room. All the dogs were barking, snuffling up and down between the houses in the *kasbah* and answering some strange dog across the valley. Joe Tawn thought finally he could recognize the barking from across the valley. It was Bessef. The damn' rascal was out looking for him.

He lay awake until dawn, half expecting that Bessef would slip in through the door. But Bessef didn't come, and in the morning twenty or so warriors from another village climbed the trail to the *kasbah*. The narrow streets echoed with their shouts of greeting, then they went into the council house with Hamidu and the others, talked for hours.

Joe Tawn heard them vaguely while he worked at the wall. All of them had their rifles, he thought, and armed men didn't move in groups in this country to keep the peace. Maybe it was some other clan they were after, but more than likely it was the Legion. Right now, though, there wasn't anything he could do. His job was still here, building the wall.

The strange warriors left the *kasbah* in the afternoon. They took a trail that led them North. Muscles tightened in Joe Tawn's back as he watched them. That was the trail for Tlemenin and Gerry's post of the Legion. In a few hours, the way that bunch traveled, they'd be there. He couldn't catch them, or get to the post first. He'd be killed before he went a mile.

His mind was occupied by that thought, a strange oppression of dread and hopelessness held him when the woman called for supper. He didn't answer the few

words she said, and his glance kept going back to Gerry's kepi on the wall. "You are a fool," she said abruptly. "There is nothing you can do. Hamidu has you watched all the time."

He stared at her and his hands trembled to grasp her shoulders. "It's true," he said. "That lot is going to Tlemenin, against the Legion."

"Yes," she said, and a blush came along her throat. "You are lucky you are here, in my house."

But Joe Tawn moved to the door then, rested looking out into the night.

THE dogs were barking again, all the time. Women flung sticks at them before it got too dark to see. But there was a sudden and furious fight down toward the end of the *kasbah;* half a dozen dogs ran in a snarling pack along the street.

It was for that Joe Tawn had waited. He stepped quickly out and grasped the first dog, jumped back into the house and shut the door. "This," he told the woman, "is my dog, Bessef. He's here for me."

The woman made no reply. Bessef had been quite badly hurt. One ear was torn nearly off and there were long gashes on his flanks. Joe Tawn held him, talked to him while the woman brought warm water and a cloth. "Look," Joe Tawn said to her. "He's got a collar, a Legion collar." He bent down close to study it, for the collar tab was new.

It was made of silver. In the center was the flaming grenade device of the Legion. Below was written: *Bessef. Joe Tawn's Dog.*

"By gorry," Joe Tawn said. The collar was Gerry's way of saying he was sorry and had been wrong. Gerry meant for Bessef to wear it until Bessef died.

Joe Tawn rose in a sure, swift motion, crossed to the wall. He came back carrying the kepi and sat down beside the woman. "Give me your knife," he said. Then he scratched hard with the knife point into the black patent leather of the kepi visor while Bessef panted at his knee.

"What can you do," the woman said, "with that? That will not make the Legion understand."

"One man, it will," Joe Tawn said. "And one man's enough." He smoothed his thumb over the marks on the visor. They formed two words. He said them quietly aloud to himself and the woman:

"Vite! Vite!"

The chin strap came loose on the kepi as he pulled it. He passed the strap end through Bessef's collar, secured the kepi high up on the neck with a strong knot. Then he glanced squarely at the woman. "He's got to go back," he said; "the dog. To take this for me. Do you want to try to stop him?"

It was the first time he had seen the woman smile. "You would kill me if I tried to stop him," she said. "And those men who have gone against the Legion aren't of my village or my clan. If they seek death, let them have it. That's what the council told them here today. There has been enough of useless killing."

"That's right," Joe Tawn said. He smiled back at her before he led Bessef to the door. He talked to Bessef for a moment there while the dog cocked the pointed muzzle up and the narrow eyes brightened. Then Joe Tawn opened the door.

Bessef was noiseless, immediately lost in shadow. At the end of the street the *kasbah* dogs got around him again, but he was too fast for them. "Shut the door," the woman told Joe Tawn. "Hamidu will be here soon. Today he almost talked the council into letting the warriors go with that clan to Tlemenin. Now his thought must be to come after you."

JOE TAWN lay in his corner as though asleep when Hamidu entered. Other men, older warriors, were with

Hamidu, and they yanked him to his feet. "You won't stay here tonight," Hamidu said. "You saw too much this afternoon to disturb your sleep. You might like to take a little walk, and end up at Tlemenin. So—" He slowly reached for the knife in his belt.

"Abd el Hamidu," the woman said, "don't do that." She stood by the far wall and the rifle with the silver-leafed stock was in her hands. "He is my man, given me by the council. You can't kill him."

"A woman," Hamidu said grinning, "the daughter of a *kaid,* tells me I can't kill a Christian. Put down the rifle, fool!" He took a stride forward, his head turned to her, and then Joe Tawn hit him.

The blow was glancing, for Joe Tawn was in motion for the door. But it was powerful enough to stumble Hamidu in among the other warriors. They yelled, rushing tightly together toward the doorway. Their shots struck high over Joe Tawn's head in the dark as he ran. He ducked lower, ran a bit faster. They'd follow him all the way to Tlemenin now, he knew. He and Gerry and the Legion had picked up quite a job.

He could hear the firing when he was still a couple of miles from the post. There was the gathered staccato of machine-gun fire, the rapping of rifles and the occasional boom of a hand grenade. The Chleuh had got quite close, then. Somehow, though, Bessef had got back, and with the kepi. Gerry wasn't the kind to use grenades every day. But if the men behind him here caught up, the men in the post wouldn't stand a chance. Hamidu led at least thirty warriors, and all of them men who were very eager to kill.

Where liveoak clumped stark on a slope he stopped to look back and find Hamidu. The man was in sight, running with the peculiar, easy lope of the mountain people. It was Hamidu's pace that set the speed for the rest; they followed like a hound pack. All right, Joe Tawn thought, I wait. I stay right here until that fella's almost up on me. Then I give him a race he can't quit.

HE waited until Hamidu's shots struck an ugly pattern all about him. Then he ran again, but slowing up as Hamidu slowed, keeping the whole party to his track. The way he went was a bit wide of the post and along the slope where that day he had chopped the tall spruce.

Hamidu's bunch knew all this country, too, he realized. They weren't fooled by him yet. The slope he was on now was where they wanted to be. It was the only one the post machine-guns couldn't sweep wide open. Hamidu had to hit the post fast and without warning to win. When he had him, Hamidu was figuring, it would be easy to crawl up through the brush right close to the post. First, though, Hamidu had to get him.

Joe Tawn laughed as he saw the piles of logs. The snow gales since he was gone had kept the Legion from getting them in. He'd counted on them, gambled Hamidu had forgotten them. Now he was here, and Hamidu was bringing the warriors carefully up from below. They weren't afraid of him; they knew he was unarmed. What they were thinking about was being spotted from the post. "Sure," Joe Tawn said, squatting behind the nearest pile. "Sure, they're going to spot you. That's my play!" He shoved the top log with all his strength.

It teetered, rolled, went swiftly down the slope. Hamidu let out a yell of warning, then there was a higher yell as a warrior was hit. Joe Tawn pushed another log, sent the entire pile loose. They were big pieces, about five feet long and several hundred pounds in weight. When they landed below where the warriors crouched it was with terrific force. Then Joe Tawn went to work on the second pile.

The bullet caught him with the sound

of a fist blow. For a second he did not think he had been really hit. Then he noticed the bright-jetting blood on his thigh and the pain sprang in his brain. He went sidewise to the ground, writhing as some of them over there did. He dully watched the lower slope, wondering which man would come to finish him.

The firing at the post had stopped. Somebody had won, he thought. It was the sergeant, most likely. The sergeant was an old soldier, the kind who looked into everything. If he took just one quick look over this way now he'd see something funny. A fella who hadn't liked the Legion much, but liked the Chleuh a lot less. A fella who used to own a dog named Bessef. Yeah, that was the name. The dog was smart, if the sergeant wasn't. Bessef had found him in the Chleuh village. And the sergeant couldn't even find him here.

Some of the delirium ebbed away and Joe Tawn could see clearly. Hamidu was on the slope, hunching along past the dead men. He moved as if he was hurt somehow, but still he moved pretty fast. His rifle was gone. What he carried was that long knife.

Joe Tawn tried to raise himself up and back. The cords trembled taut in his arms when he saw Bessef and the sergeant.

The two ran side by side. Eight or ten men in khaki followed them, their bayonet blades thin and cruel in the sun. Joe Tawn closed his eyes as the bayonets swung at Hamidu. He had figured too much for Hamidu, he thought. But now that was done.

He mumbled words with the same meaning to Gerry. "Keep quiet," Gerry said, "until we're in the post. Your dog beat that bunch by half an hour, and he certainly brought the right word. Just answer me one thing. Where's the guys who were here?"

"Dead, I reckon," Joe Tawn said, "or racing theirselves home—"

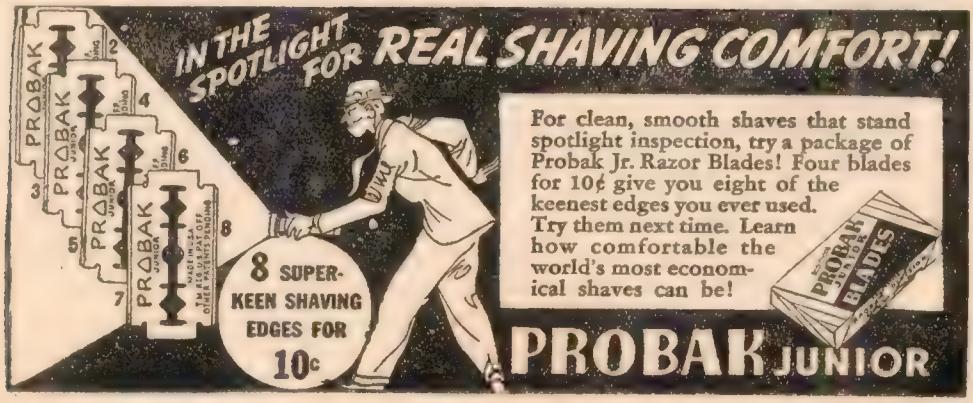
THE officers from battalion base had gone, and the doctor with the mule train carrying the seriously wounded. Gerry came back alone into the little hospital room. "I fixed it," he told Joe Tawn. "The major says everything's square on your service record. All the desertion and other stuff is out. You're set again to try for non-com."

"I'm sure glad about the record," Joe Tawn said. "But ain't I to be sent to base hospital with them other boys?"

"No," Gerry said. "You stay right here with me, and that there dog. While you're in bed you learn to write French, like we said before. This is what you take for a starter: 'The cap of my uncle. It cost one hundred and twenty francs.'"

Joe Tawn scratched his sweating brow. "Ain't that about the cap something yuh don't like?"

"It used to be," Gerry said. "But now it's Legion history."


IN THE SPOTLIGHT FOR REAL SHAVING COMFORT!
For clean, smooth shaves that stand spotlight inspection, try a package of Probak Jr. Razor Blades! Four blades for 10¢ give you eight of the keenest edges you ever used. Try them next time. Learn how comfortable the world's most economical shaves can be!
8 SUPER-KEEN SHAVING EDGES FOR 10c
PROBAK JUNIOR
PROBAK
BLADES

After Three Knives Missed Him, the American Was Credited with Being on the Devil's Payroll

WITHOUT EXAGGERATION

By WILLIAM E. BARRETT

Author of "Men Without Mountains," etc.

JACK BRANNIGAN stood before the government palace of Paraguay, once the Palacio de Lopez, and looked out over the bay of Asuncion at the trim white yacht of Perry Winton. Because Perry Winton had less brains than money, Brannigan had a job that promised him a thousand dollars.

Brannigan whistled softly and out of tune, the bright sunlight wrinkling the corners of his eyes and the mingled odors of the busy waterfront causing his nostrils

to twitch. He was a long way from that thousand dollars and he knew it. Tall and lean, in his early thirties and with a reputation for getting things done, Brannigan's status south of Rio was unique. The United States diplomatic corps frowned on him officially and, unofficially, gave him jobs to do.

The present job was strictly unofficial.

Perry Winton had taken two diamonds on a tour of the waterfront dives on the night before. The diamonds belonged to his wife's necklace and had dropped from their setting. When Winton came back from his excursion, the diamonds did not. Now he wanted the gems without investigation or publicity; especially not publicity. His wife did not know that the diamonds were gone and she did not know that Perry Winton had visited waterfront dives. She wasn't supposed to know. It was all very complicated and all very American.

Winton's contribution to the investigation was a vague description. "I got dizzy and keeled over. Dope maybe. Then a man with a swarthy, pock-marked face bent over me and thrust his hand into my pocket——"

Brannigan strolled away from the government palace with his hands in his pockets. Behind the buildings of government and paralleling the waterfront were narrow streets where sailors made merry and where dock workers joined them in their fun; a district where the smell of *cana* vied with the all pervading Paraguayan perfume of orange blossoms, where flat-roofed, white-washed, one story buildings housed saloons and where swift and violent things could happen to a man who was not cautious.

"A swarthy, pock-marked man!"

Brannigan snorted. He could recruit a corporal's guard of such men in five minutes. He put the tip of his tongue against the two pivot teeth in the front of his mouth and spat accurately through the aperture that appeared when the teeth moved. It was a trick that stimulated thought, as whistling did.

"Alms, Senor!" The voice startled him.

HE LOOKED to his left and saw an ancient and weather-beaten man who squatted tailor-fashion with his back to a dobe wall, a dirty Sombrero straw upended between his bony knees. The beggar pressed upon hesitation.

"I am Rafael, Senor, and renowned for trouble and for ill luck."

Brannigan grinned. The beggar had a dissipated look that he approved of; it bespoke a knowledge of dives and of the people who patronize them. He plunged a hand into his pocket and withdrew several Paraguayan paper pesos. He dropped them in the hat and sat down against the wall beside the beggar. He flipped an American silver dollar in the air before Rafael's fascinated eyes and held it in his palm when it came down.

"How about luck for other people, Rafael?" he said. "You got it, amigo?"

"I pray you some, Senor."

"Swell. An Americano lost two diamonds down here last night, big ones. An unwashed unmentionable with a pock-marked face stole them. I'm looking for them."

The beggar traced a pattern in the dust with his big toe. "Two diamonds in all Paraguay, Senor?"

"Don't let's play games. How far do I have to go to find those stones."

Brannigan flipped the silver dollar again and Rafael followed its gleaming arc. "They will be close by," he sighed. "Diamonds, Senor, have no owners. They, what you say, circulate, no? One does not spend the diamond. One does not buy a gem from a *ratero*."

"Now you're talking sense. I got that far myself. How will I find the man who has those stones—and fast?"

The old man sat like a statue. "The buzzards follow one who is about to die," he said softly, "and a poor man with gems,

Senor, in such a place as this is like a man without water in the desert." He nodded his head gravely. "I would look for buzzards, Senor."

Brannigan grunted. "And beat the buzzards to the corpse. It's an idea, Rafael. You've got stuff."

He flipped the American dollar into the hat and stood up. He did not look up as he made his way down the alley-like street to the section that was less Paraguay than it was all of South America; the street of sailors where many countries met.

IN THE pitiless light of day, the huddled shacks and low buildings had all of the allure of a dirty and dishevelled squaw sleeping in the sun. With the rising of the moon, however, the squaw would become a siren. It would wrap the sable mantle of night about itself and become alluring, mysterious, glamorous, sinful—and very dangerous.

Brannigan put the tip of his tongue against the two hinged teeth and spat in the dust. "What I've got to do is wait for night and watch for buzzards," he said, "that lad, Rafael, has talent."

Hours later, Jack Brannigan sat slumped over his table in the Café Onza de Oro with a cap pulled far down on his forehead. To all intents and purposes, he was very drunk, but he watched the second table on his right from under the peak of the cap.

There was a man at that table who was genuinely drunk and very dirty. The history of Paraguay was in his skinny body and flat-nosed, dust-brown face. Spaniard, Guarani Indian, Portugee and conscript Brazilian Negro; he had them all in his family tree and he was the logical product—a shifty-eyed, unkempt scoundrel whose treachery was policed only by cowardice. Brannigan knew the type from past experience. He was more interested in the Breed's companion.

The second man at the table was a fat Spaniard whose eyes were bright with greed; a man who, by his clothes and general appearance, would not have spoken to the breed on the street. The Spaniard was not being proud now. He seemed delighted with his company and he played the rôle of listener to perfection as he kept filling and refilling the breed's glass.

Jack Brannigan had seen him make three attempts to take some mysterious object out of the breed's breast pocket.

In a far corner of the room, three unsavory looking characters of undetermined ancestry were drinking noisily, banging glasses on the table top and talking in loud tones. Brannigan classified their fun as too forced to be natural and watched them carefully while pretending to slump lower in his chair. Occasionally, he caught a vicious glance thrown at the table where the Spaniard entertained the breed.

"Buzzards!" he murmured, "or I don't know buzzards."

The breed dropped his drink. There was a sharp ring as the glass hit the table top and then a brittle tinkle of falling fragments. The loud talk ceased at the table in the corner and the three hard looking men stiffened in their chairs. The breed lolled forward and his head dropped into the broken glass on the table top. The fat Spaniard was up like a shot and around the table with a speed remarkable for a man of his bulk.

"Santa Maria! You are sick, my friend. In that glass, your face! A thousand pities!"

THE man was sputtering and commiserating as he interposed his bulk between the table in the corner and the passed-out breed. A waiter was moving lazily across the room and a man in a dirty

apron was walking around the end of the bar. The Spaniard seemed intent only upon lifting his companion's face out of the broken glass on the table-top. Brannigan's eyes narrowed and, without lifting his head out of the attitude of drunken stupor that he had assumed, he watched every move of the fat man.

So deftly that the motion all but escaped the vigilant American, the Spaniard's fingers flashed into the buttoned breast pocket of the breed. The button popped and the Spaniard's fingers curled back into his palm. A slight shift of his body and his hand moved forward again—empty. He was still trying to raise the unconscious man's slumped body. The little interlude had taken place in split seconds.

"That fat boy is well equipped with fingers; I'll remember that."

Brannigan made a mental note. The waiter had reached the table and the Spaniard had his comrade's body lifted from the table top and draped back over the chair where it drooped grotesquely. There were several little streams of blood running down the man's face but, apart from the effects of too much alcohol, he did not seem to be seriously hurt.

The Spaniard seemed suddenly to have lost interest in the breed's fate. He made no effort to swab off the blood. Instead. he wiped his hands and stepped back. "I have thought that he was sick," he said piously. "And I would have helped him. He is but drunk. Pouff! No gentleman takes too much liquor. I will settle his bill."

His attitude conveyed to all in the room that he had been betrayed and had wasted his friendship on one who was unworthy. His pose that he had considered the breed a "gentleman" was artistic but not convincing. With a strut of conscious virtue he waddled to the bar and laid down a bill and two pieces of silver. Then, without a backward glance, he pushed through the door leading to the street and was gone. Cursing softly, the waiter and the man in the soiled apron lifted the breed from his chair and heaved him through the narrow backdoor into the alley. Brannigan's eyes twinkled.

"Evidently, he whispered. "One simply must be a gentleman in the Café Onza de Oro."

THE three men in the corner had risen hastily almost with the echo of the slamming front door. Two of them, with a speed that left no doubt of their intent, darted for the door. The other paused only to snap his fingers at the two who were throwing the breed out of the rear door and to slap a few small coins on the bar; then he was gone.

For several seconds Brannigan maintained his slumped pose; then he started hiccupping noisily. His body seemed to jerk with it and he lurched to his feet. The waiter turned to him with alarm and Brannigan reeled across the room. There were a half dozen men of all breeds and nationalities scattered about the room and Brannigan made his act good. Falling over his own feet and coughing like a one-lunged motorboat he slapped a gold peso on the bar and made hurriedly for the door. That gold coin was four times the price of drinks and that, in itself, was enough to prove that he was drunk. He was forgotten almost as soon as he had cleared the door.

Once outside, however, Brannigan no longer acted a part. Stepping clear of the dim yellow light that filtered out of the dive, he crouched and searched the shadows. Swift as he had been on pursuit, there was no clue to the direction taken by the fat Spaniard or the three that trailed him.

The heavy, indescribable odor of the waterfront two squares away blended with the strange tropical scents that the night wind blew across Asuncion. There were few lights and only the grinding of metal and the constant thumping sounds from the docks broke the silence. Bran-

nigan sniffed to get his bearings like an animal orienting itself to strange surroundings; then, for no logical reason, he elected to turn left.

Once decided upon a course, he moved swiftly and stealthily through the shadows, taking care not to move within a knife arm's length of the dark doorways. Two narrow, crooked, alley-like streets branched off at weird angles from the street that he followed and, for a second, he paused. Something rustled in the darkness to his left and he made his decision in a twinkling. Crouched almost to the ground, he glided in the direction of the sound. It was impossible here to keep a safe distance from the doorways so he adopted the other extreme and hugged the wall.

The darkness was absolute; impenetrable. Brannigan's senses became abnormally acute and he could feel rather than see or hear life in the narrow street. Ahead of him, he knew, something living was on the prowl but what or how many he could not tell.

SUDDENLY, the alley widened out into a clearing and some vagrant beam from the waterfront flashed for a second between the two flimsy structures at the far end.

Brannigan felt that flicker of light touch him and, at the same second, he saw a dark blob move in the deeper shadow near the shacks. The mass had no human shape or semblance but it moved with incredible speed, seeming to split or twist or unwind in the fractional second that was given Brannigan for observation. Instinctively, Brannigan flinched and dropped.

There was a flicker like a drop of living light in the darkness and something passed his ear with a sharp hiss. It pinged into the wooden front of the house against which he crouched and he could hear steel sing as it vibrated from impact. His lips tightened over his teeth.

"A knife man," he muttered. "Close, too, the murdering scum!"

He had no time for any further mental exercises. Hell seemed to erupt in the alley with the throwing of that knife. Two figures, darker even than the darkness of the alley, shadow against shadow, passed Brannigan with the speed of jungle things on the hunt. As one, they hurled themselves across the clearing from whence the knife had flashed. A series of grunts and a muttered oath gave testimony of the fact that they had closed on their prey. Brannigan reached behind him and plucked the knife from the boards. Reaching down, he stuck it into the cuff of his trousers.

As he made a motion to straighten up, something dropped on his back and he went over.

The instincts of the barroom fighter were in Jack Brannigan. He hit rolling and his right arm flashed up over his shoulder and fastened hard on the back of a greasy neck. The muscles rippled in that powerful arm like writhing snakes; then tightened into steel cables. His assailant gave a choked squawk like the cry of a strangled chicken and then buried his teeth in Brannigan's shoulder.

A THROB of agony went through the American as those sharp teeth bit down, but he knew that he was facing a graver danger than teeth. All that he ever hoped to possess would have gone down on a bet that this greasy attacker's right hand held a knife. Brannigan's left moved almost in the same instant that his right tightened and the teeth bit. His powerful fingers sought and found the left wrist of his attacker. With one powerful wrench, he pulled that left arm across his body and felt the weight of the other man shift on his back. A knife point pricked his right side and he twisted the left wrist with a deft, bone cracking motion.

The teeth of the attacker released their grip and he gave a sharp yip of agony as his elbow joint went out. Brannigan's

jaw hardened and he cut the cry short by applying his half Nelson more tightly. His legs bent and he bowed forward from the waist. Like a limp sack his assailant spun over his shoulder and hit with a dull thud in the alley. Brannigan dropped on him and his left fist found a target. His right dipped and twisted. When he bounded to his feet, he had another knife. This one went into the other pants cuffs and Brannigan was moving with a leopard's speed toward the struggle in the clearing.

As he ran, Brannigan cursed himself for a clumsy fool. The three trailers had lost the Spaniard where the streets branched off and they would probably be still hunting aimlessly through the dark if he, Brannigan, had not brought them down. He had drawn a knife from the Spaniard and the ring of steel had brought the assassins. A slight shift in the balance of his luck and Brannigan would have been an exceedingly dead Norte Americano.

Somebody lighted two lanterns down on the waterfront a hundred yards away. Two thin streams of pale yellow light penetrated the pitch blackness of the wide place that terminated the alley. Brannigan skidded as he brought his rush up short to whirl on the balls of his feet for a new lunge. In the thin glow he had a flash of a scene that sent his pulses throbbing.

The fat Spaniard was bent backward over a watering trough. One of his assailants was wrapped around his thick body, hanging on with a leg scissors and a head hold. The other man was standing in front of him with his fingers locked in his hair. The Spaniard's head was tilted far back and his throat gleamed whitely. The light reflected off a knife that was raised above that expanse of throat.

All of this Brannigan saw in a fraction of the time that it would take his mind to translate the scene into words. His supple body shifted in a flash and he threw his right fist. Like a weighted shaft it smashed to the point of the knife wielder's jaw and the man went down without a cry. Quick to take advantage of his reprieve, the Spaniard snapped his head down and broke the other attacker's hold. With a low growl he expanded his huge body and fell forward. Crushed underneath that huge bulk, the attacker gave a short, choking scream and went limp. The Spaniard came to his feet with remarkable agility and, without a word to Brannigan, took to his heels.

BRANNIGAN was a bit startled at this unexpected turn, but he had followed this man through too much to give up the chase now. With long easy strides he followed the other and he had no difficulty in keeping him in sight. When the Spaniard darted into a doorway, Brannigan was right behind him. Then came the second surprise. The man spun around on his heels the moment that he cleared the door. As Brannigan plunged in, a great, ham-like hand came to meet him and he felt the shock to the very soles of his feet.

Quick as a cat and with the skilled fighter's automatic covering when hurt, Brannigan pulled his head down on his chest and lashed out. His fist buried itself in a thick mass of belt-line fat and he heard an agonized grunt from the darkness. His left stabbed swiftly at the source of the grunt and again he landed clean. The big body of the Spaniard crashed against a wall and his voice came in a thin whisper.

"Santa Maria! Senor, have mercy. I am a sick man and my seven children—"

"Okay. They'll be your seven orphans if you step out of line again. March ahead to some place where we can talk."

Brannigan's right hand dipped to his pants cuff and he emphasized his command with a prod of the knife. The Spaniard gave a shrill cry of alarm and, promising everything under heaven, moved down the hall. Behind the stairs he found a door which opened to his touch. Warily and

pressing persuasively with the knife, Brannigan followed him in.

A match flared and the Spaniard groped his way to a scarred and greasy table. There was a candle stuck in a bottle on the table top and another match sufficed to light it. With a loud grunt, the Spaniard dropped into a chair. Brannigan looked him over appraisingly. There were still marks of terror in the man's face and he was white and dewed with perspiration as the result of his exertions and the force of Brannigan's blow. Still, he was not an unpleasant looking man as looks go south of Rio. His face was cunning rather than vicious, his eyes crafty rather than vicious, his eyes crafty rather than cruel. In spite of his present predicament and obvious distrust of Brannigan's intentions, he exuded an aura of vast self-assurance and aplomb.

"My name, Senor," he said, "is Don Francisco de Velasco y Artigas de Portenos Rodriguez Lapido Moreno." His chest swelled despite the fact that he was keeping his hand on his waistline. "I am the best man with the knife in all Paraguay. Your name, Senor, is—?"

Brannigan grinned. "Only fools have names down here," he said softly. "Not casting any reflections. I'm going to call you Steve. It's shorter than that family history you just recited."

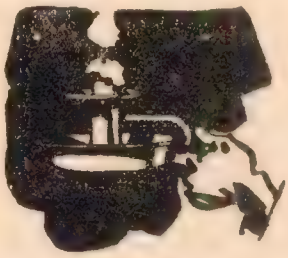
The Don frowned. "It is not good manners to withhold your name."

"Was it good manners to run away after I'd saved your life?"

THE Don pursed his lips. "It was not a time for manners. Should I stay and let you save it again when those fellows did awake?" He looked at the American shrewdly. "Besides, you did not save my life because you loved me as a brother or because you like fighting in the dark. You have a price. If it is not too high, then I will thank you."

"Fair enough!" Brannigan laughed. The laugh, however, was swiftly replaced by an expression of grim earnestness as the American leaned across the table. "Let me see what you took from the half breed in the Onza de Oro," he said.

The Spaniard looked startled for a split second, then he pursed his lips piously. "I



did take nothing from him. He was uncouth and drunken. I paid his check and——"

Brannigan waved his hand impatiently. "I could sprawl you out on the floor and search you," he said softly. "I'm being polite—so far."

The Don sighed. His hand rubbed his middle reflectively. "I will show you, Senor," he said mournfully, "but remember, I have seven children. These baubles are my family heirlooms, stolen from me by that scum of a no-caste."

"You're a liar and not a convincing one. Show me the baubles that you're prattling about!" Brannigan's jaw was set hard and it jutted across the table. The Don shuddered and reached reluctantly into his pocket. Still more reluctantly he opened a black snuff box and allowed the contents to roll out upon the table top. Brannigan's eyes widened.

Two incredibly large diamonds winked up at him; living gems that shamed the flickering candle and the untidy kennel of a room in which the two men sat. Brannigan held his breath. Wealth and luxury, beauty and wonder, gleamed there with a dirty table for a setting. Gems such as might grace a crown or flash against ermine knocked about in the dirty dives of the worst section of Asuncion. No wonder Perry Winton had been willing to pay high for their return. He moistened his lips.

"Do you know whose they are?" he demanded grimly.

The Don himself seemed to be under the spell of the jewels. "God knows," he said simply, "They have been bought with many knives and much blood. Such gems belong to the devil. Men but borrow them."

Brannigan leaned forward. "They belong to an American," he growled. "He was robbed last night. I am taking them back to him."

HE SUITED action to the word by dropping the wrapped gems into his watch pocket. The Don's eyes were bulging. His hand moved like the head of a striking snake and a blade flashed. Brannigan felt that movement rather than saw it. He had a prizefighter's instinct for anticipating a blow from any angle. He twisted out of the chair and pulled his waistline in to make a small target. The blade hissed through his coat, scratched the skin above his ribs and hit the back of the chair with a sharp ring. Brannigan lashed out.

Like a pile driver his right fist thudded against the Spaniard's chin. Without a sound, the man slumped forward and took the table with him to the floor. The candle, sucked suddenly downward, made a low, sighing sound and went out. Black darkness settled upon the room.

The knife still vibrated with a soft, singing note in the back of the chair. Brannigan plucked it out and dropped it into his pants cuff. Then he backed slowly to the wall. He now had three knives. Each knife was a souvenir of an attempt on his life and over his heart was the price of the attempts.

There was a cautious stirring on the floor near the table, a heavy movement as though an elephant slept fretfully. Brannigan grinned. "Too bad, Steve," he said softly.

He slid along the wall toward the door, still mindful of the fact that this man threw a knife superlatively well. The voice of the Don came mournfully from the floor. "The devil has given you his protection, Senor. I am the best dam' man with the knife in all Paraguay but I did miss you across a table. Senor, I have written my name on a door with knife strokes at twenty feet and it has been a script most beautiful, but you!"

"Yeah. I heard that the first time. I'm on the devil's payroll. Well, let it be a lesson to you. Feel for the horns and hoofs next time before you flip a sticker."

He had reached the door and his hand closed over the knob. With a creak the door swung open—from black darkness into black darkness. Brannigan took one step forward before he scented danger; then it was too late. There was a quick rush of feet in the passageway, something hit him broadside at the waistline and his feet went out from under him. It seemed as though a huge mob was holding high carnival over his body; then his head crashed against the jamb of the door and the darkness dissolved into a whirling mass of red and yellow light as he passed out.

BRANNIGAN blinked back to consciousness with the taste of blood in his mouth and the roaring of express trains in his ears. He seemed to be tossing around on a heavy sea and for a moment he thought that it was part of the sensation of returning consciousness; then he knew differently. A voice was purring above him and rough hands were working him over. He realized that he was being trussed up and, for a second, he fought against it. As soon as he realized, however, that his hands were already tied tightly and that the last loop was being squeezed over his ankles, he desisted and played dead. Even if he had been free at the moment he knew that he would be an easy victim for anyone with strength above that of a child. The voice purred on.

"——and so, my friends. this Norte

Americano is nothing to me. He did want the gems for himself and, as everyone knows, there is no need of wealth in that country. Me, I am a poor man with seven children but had you come to me, Senors, and said to me that you were three and I but one and that you did carry knives, I would have given you gladly the gems. You did not make known your wants, Senors, and who can blame me?"

Brannigan recognized the glib voice of the Don and, despite his grim predicament and an inordinate amount of pain, he found humor in the situation. The Don had been speaking in Spanish. Another voice broke in roughly in the coarse patois of the low caste.

"Why did you not want us to kill this Norte Americano if he is not your friend?"

"Because I am not a fool. Any corpse is bad luck, but the corpse of a Norte Americano is very exceedingly great and unholy bad luck. You can drop him in the bay from a boat and I will not care, but he must walk to the boat. A walking man can be explained, but not one that is carried."

The coarse voice was raised again as though to argue, then it leaped off in a flow of curses. There was sharp movement in the room and Brannigan opened his eyes. The three men who had had a corner table in the Onza de Oro were in the room; much the worse for wear, but decidedly in command of the situation.

The cursing had been occasioned by the act of one of them in picking up the two gems from the table. Evidently, Brannigan's pockets had been explored before he regained consciousness.

Off to one side, the Don was standing docilely but his eyes seemed to hold some secret knowledge as he waited patiently for the three to settle their argument. They were at it hammer and tongs over the table and the mutilated Spanish rattled too fast for Brannigan to follow more than the general drift. The Don folded his arms.

"I am desolated," he said, "that there were but two gems and three men to claim them. You face a hard problem, Senors."

THE glares of the three showed that they were conscious of the problem. Brannigan twisted uncomfortably and spat between his pivot teeth. He was willing to bet that at least one of those three would not live to see morning under the circumstances; he was not willing to bet that he'd see morning himself.

The argument over the table top ceased abruptly. The roughest looking of the trio, a scarred and pock-marked individual with rummy eyes, scooped the diamonds off the table with an oath and dropped them into his pocket.

"We will sell them and divide the money," he said. The other two eyed him hotly with their hands on the hilts of long knives. He ignored them and strode across the floor. He kicked viciously at Brannigan and the American's lips twisted back in a snarl as the kick bounced off his ribs. The man kicked again and Brannigan twisted his body to take the blow rolling. As he did, he caught a glimpse of the intense, covetous expressions on the two other cutthroats. He saw also that which took his breath away.

The Don had edged close to the table upon which the lighted candle stood and his bulk was leaned against the table while he bent slightly at the knees. Brannigan knew what was going to happen, yet that did not keep him from being startled with the suddenness of events in the next few seconds.

The table went over with a crash and the candle went out with a tired sigh. Curses sounded in the room and the man who had kicked Brannigan tripped over him now in his anxiety to turn toward the suspected treachery behind him. Somebody crashed into him and he gave a short

scream that ended in a choked gurgle. Brannigan rolled fast toward the wall and was just in time to get out of the way of a falling body. He had known that body was about to fall. A knifed man makes a certain sound.

The others were on the floor now milling over the body and it was easy to visualize the questing fingers in the darkness. No one was risking a light. Brannigan pressed hard against the wall and contorted his body so that his hands could just touch his ankles. He was tied at wrists and ankles so that it was impossible to hold a position long enough to loosen his bonds. He felt a thrill run through him as his fingers touched something hard in his pants cuff. The Don had not known about the knives. No Latin would think of carrying a knife in a place where it is so hard to free it quickly.

With nervous haste, Brannigan worked one of the knives free. He had a terrible moment while his bound, clumsy hands fumbled the knife; then he had it firmly and was sawing at the bonds. In a twinkling his feet were free. The hands were another matter. It was hard to turn that blade so that it would bear down with any strength behind it upon the bonds which fastened his wrists. Just as he thought that he had it, a match flared and the wick of the candle caught and there was light again; the candle standing upright in its bottle beside the over-turned table.

The two cutthroats straightened up with snare on their faces from above the body of the third member of the group. One of them held the diamonds in his palm. At the far end of the room, besides the candle, stood the Don. He was smiling genially but with a rather terrible air of confidence. Balanced lightly in the palm of his hand was the dead man's knife.

"Fools," he said gently, "spend their lives to get *things* and wise men take the things away from them. You did both try to get the diamonds and you left the knife for me. That, you dive cockroaches, was an error most grave. I am the best man with a knife in all Paraguay."

HE WAS holding the knife with the blade laying flat against his fingers, the point just behind the tip of the middle finger. His thumb was bent to steady it and he seemed to be merely weighing it. There was something about that knife and the way in which it was held, however, which drew the eyes of the two assassins from the Onza de Oro. They had knives themselves and they were two to one, but they were like men under the drop of a master gunman; rooted.

Brannigan had not moved and he held his feet together so that the rope still hung over his ankles and did not appear, in her dim light, as severed. Behind his back, his strong fingers were busy working the blade back and forth over the strands that held his wrists. Close, hard, delicate work at best, it was complicated by the fact that he must not draw attention to his activities. His best card lay in his apparent helplessness.

The two thugs were still standing half crouched over the body of the leader that they had slain. The one who had possessed himself of the two diamonds still held them cupped in the palm of his hand. There was blood running into his palm, too, in a thin stream from a cut at the base of his thumb. The diamonds were bathed in it and that might have been symbolic if there had been a poet to note the fact. There were no poets in that grimy room.

The Don still held the knife delicately balanced. Without glancing at the fallen table, he reached out with one foot and kicked it upright. For a full second it rocked back and forth on unsteady legs. The man with the diamonds closed his hand and snarled; the Don stiffened.

"You will lay those stones on the table and damn quick!" he said grimly. At that moment he was the star knife man and not the easy going crafty schemer. The thug across the room was too dull witted

to understand. With a ripping oath, he dropped his free hand to the blood stained knife in his belt.

The Don went up on his toes. His body seemed scarcely to move, but his wrist snapped in much the same fashion as that of a pitcher throwing a curve. His blade became a thin, whining line of reflected light and Brannigan, who lay safely out of range, flinched instinctively. The man who had gone for his knife had no time to flinch.

With a wild, wailing cry that died on a high note, he rose to his toes, spun once and went face downward across the body of his leader. The diamonds rolled across the floor unheeded.

Brannigan's breath whistled through his loosened pivot teeth. He had never seen a knife thrown like that before; with such speed, accuracy and penetrating power. The surviving thug had evidently seen no such demonstration either. He stood as though paralysed with his eyes popped and staring, his right hand still on the hilt of his own knife, his left arm limp where Brannigan had twisted and borne down.

THE Don raised his hand and held it palm upward, thumb curled in. "You will drop your knife at once," he roared.

His arm moved with the command and the thug across the table ducked, vented a broken, sobbing curse—and dropped his knife. The Don laughed, took two steps forward and hit the man full on the jaw. The frightened wretch dropped like a log and he probably never realized in his dull brain that he had commanded the whole situation for a moment; the only man in the room with a knife and free to use it. Yet, he had been bluffed out.

Still chuckling, the Don bent over to pick up the two gems which gleamed defiantly up from the filth and the blood on the floor. Brannigan twisted his steel fingers hard and the restraining strands of cord parted. Like a rubber ball bouncing off the pavement, he came to his feet. His arms were still numb from the bonds, but his legs had been free long enough for the blood to get back in circulation.

Stooped over the gleaming jewels, the Don heard the scuffling sound behind him. He half straightened and that was as far as he got. With a free leg swing that would have done credit to a star drop-kicker, Brannigan propelled his toe into the seat of the Don's wide pants. The Spaniard did an elephantine somersault that shook the frail building. When he squared around, he found himself facing a Brannigan who stood spreadlegged and balanced a keen knife. The American grinned.

"I can't throw this thing like you can," he said, "but I learned to carve at Thanksgiving time up home. Want me to show you?"

The Don didn't and his expression showed that unmistakably. He sighed deeply. "Your kick was brutal and unjust," he said, "I did save your life from these neck-slitting swine and——"

"Sure. And you were going to turn me loose and divvy, weren't you? Sure." Brannigan's eyes were mocking. The Spaniard shrugged. He knew his book and he knew when to be frank and when to dissemble.

"Of a certainty, no," he said. "I have a wife and seven children and you did say yourself that he owns gems who keeps them best. *Bueno.*"

"Okay! I'll play that way. Put the diamonds on the table. Both of them."

"Both of them, Senor?" The Don rose slowly. He was no longer crafty, nor

commanding, nor threatening—nor even suave. He had the heartbroken look of a child; ridiculous on his broad, flat face but not altogether ineffective. Brannigan snapped his fingers.

"Both of them," he said, "I'm being paid to recover them. I'll pay you fifty bucks American for your help. But the diamonds go back."

HE DID not mention the embarrassing fact, that, unless he killed or disabled the Don before he left, it would be doubtful business trying to reach the yacht of Perry Winton. The Don was a bad man to leave behind one on dark streets. Evidently, however, the Don was not disposed to talk of such matters, either. He bowed politely.

"The Senor is most kind," he said. "I will myself, personal, go with him to where he can get the small boat."

The wad of cotton in which the gems had been wrapped was lying on the floor and Brannigan retrieved it. His pivot teeth had fallen out when he kicked and he retrieved them, too, for sentimental reasons. He did not make the mistake, however, of taking his eyes off the Don. He faced his "partner" while he bent over and he found the objects of his search by the sense of touch. The Don sighed.

Suddenly the sole survivor of the cutthroat gang came to life. He gave a low moan and started up with a startled cry as though the fear of death had ridden with him into unconsciousness and was waking with him. The Don growled and took one step. His foot lashed out and the thug sank back without a moan.

"He would have followed us, the scum!" he said piously. "Such low thieves are unfit to live."

His back was to Brannigan and, for a moment, his big body hid the man on the floor. It also hid the knife that the man had dropped. The Don's foot moved again; not violently this time, but with a certain skill and deftness. The toe of his thin shoe pressed down upon the handle of the knife and slid off. The knife flipped upward and the Don caught it without appearing to do anything but move naturally and lumberingly toward the door. As the knife disappeared up his sleeve, the Don smiled and it was not a nice smile if there was anyone to see it.

Brannigan walked behind him through the dark hallway.

The lights of many ships winked across the water when Brannigan and the Don reached the docks, but there was a deep hush over the harbor; the hush of dark hours before dawn. It was a poor time for a man to seek a ship or to board one, but such things are done. Brannigan would have done stranger things to get out of Asuncion without delay. He was carrying on his person the price of many deaths and every hour that he kept the gems increased the chances of his death being one of the many. The Don anticipated him.

"My fifty dollars now, Senor. Twenty-five more and I get for you one fine boat."

BRANNIGAN'S eyes narrowed. "Okay!" he said softly. "I'm trusting you so far."

He was prepared for treachery and he was surprised when none developed. By dint of threat and argument, the Don prevailed upon the owner of a small boat to get out and get to work; but, Brannigan who followed every word of the conversation, knew that he did not mention the stones nor make a deal. He was puzzled. Surly, but complacent, the boatman started up his engine. Brannigan breathed deep and reached in his pocket.

"You've played fair and so will I, he said. Here's your money. Seventy-five dollars American, and thanks"

The Don bowed and accepted the money. It disappeared into his breast pocket. Brannigan turned toward the boat. He took three steps before the Don's voice arrested him.

"Now, Senor, the gems. He owns a gem who can keep it."

Brannigan wheeled. The Don was standing poised on his toes and some vagrant gleam of light reflected off a blade that rested along the fingers of his cupped right hand. Brannigan cursed.

"I regret this, Senor, but I have a wife and seven children," the Don said mournfully. "And though you could carve me if you were close enough, you will not get close enough. I am desolate but it is business. The diamonds, Senor!"

Brannigan hesitated. Without the diamonds, he might as well stay in Asuncion; yet there was something strangely chilling in that poised arm. His hand dipped reluctantly into his pocket and came out with two cotton wrapped objects that he held for a moment and dropped with a hopeless gesture upon the ground. He turned to go.

"Wait, Senor. If that is only cotton?"

The Don leaped forward with surprising agility and, still facing Brannigan, swept the cotton off the planks. His fingers closed on it and he nodded. Brannigan waved and climbed into the boat.

"Adios," he said, "and regards to the seven chidren."

The Don's smile was visible against the black background of his night wrapped country.

"*Si,* Senor," he said softly. "*Vaya con Dios.*"

A few seconds later, the little launch was cutting the water. Brannigan grinned at the back of a swarthy neck. "I wonder," he said, "if the Don will keep my teeth for a souvenir and how long it will take him to find out that he didn't get diamonds?"

Some instinct warned him as he spoke and, with a born fighter's reaction, he pulled in his head. Something whined through the air and fanned the tip of his ear. He touched the ear with his hand and felt a trickle of blood. His breath whistled through the gap in his mouth where the pivot teeth had been. With incredulous eyes, he measured the distance to shore and tried to believe that a man had hurled a knife accurately over that distance.

He held his hand palm up and looked at the blood on his fingertips; then his eyes shifted to the imperturbable boatman who had not even raised his head when the steel whined. The fellow reminded him of Rafael, the beggar; calm, ageless, unruffled. Rafael had said that diamonds circulated and that they attracted buzzards. The Don had claimed to be the best knife man in all Paraguay. Brannigan felt the diamonds in his pocket and chuckled.

"I'll say this for the people of Paraguay," he said aloud, "they never exaggerate anything."

The boatman nodded his head wearily. "No, Senor," he said softly.

50% more pleasure for your cigar money

Cremo CIGARS

FORMERLY 5¢ - NOW 3 FOR 10¢

25

Some Sinners Is Powerful Righteous

By CADDO CAMERON

Author of "At the End of a Texas Rope," "Fetch Me a Fight," etc.

Chapter I

A Longhawn Deputy from Devil's River

Aside from a pain in his neck and a bad taste in his mouth, Skyline Jackson experienced no disturbing symptoms when Flash Harrigan came within range of his sight and hearing.

Recently having been appointed deputy sheriff of the county, Skyline had shown a normal spark of interest when Flash rode into the peaceful little town of Bandera, Texas, situated in the hill country fifty miles north of San Antonio. As time went on, however, that spark grew to be a flame which now threatened to become a conflagration.

A Longhawn Deputy from Devil's River Puts the Law Across in Bandera, Texas

A widely traveled man, brought up in the Devil's River region, the big deputy had known all sorts of men in his day; and when he became acquainted with Flash Harrigan, he said to himself that here was a fellow with all the earmarks of a stem-windin' sport, a gambler, and maybe a gunman. Why he should elect to hang around a quiet town like Bandera, was a question for which Skyline had as yet found no answer.

Late one sunshiny afternoon in July, the red-headed deputy propped his six-foot-one against a porch post in front of the Carmichael & Hay store and gazed morosely across the street at the verandah of the Duffy Hotel, where Flash Harrigan was in lively conversation with Jessie North. At the moment Skyline's long face was even longer than nature intended it to be, for Jessie was his girl. It was generally known that they had an understanding, and everybody figured they'd get married if the lanky, bronc-ridin' deputy ever got nerve enough to ask her to name the day.

So Skyline Jackson continued to gaze across the dusty street, reflecting that there were a whole slew of things an officer of the law ought to know about a fella like Flash Harrigan; and he resolved to find them out.

Suddenly his herd of evil tempered thoughts was stampeded by an insinuating voice at his shoulder.

"They shore do make a mighty fine lookin' team."

Travis Crockett Jackson slowly and belligerently turned his head. He scowled into a pair of deep-set, twinkling gray eyes nearly on a level with his own. His wrathful glance explored the wrinkles in a large, bony face with a white mustache, a hooked nose, and a background of snow-

white hair topped off by a low-crowned Stetson; his best friend—Kickapoo Joe North, sheriff of Bandera County, owner of the Dead Indian outfit, one of the grandest liars in Texas, and the father of Jessie North.

"Huh-rumph!" answered Skyline.

OLD KICK fingered his mustache, gazing proudly at the couple across the street. "Yes sah-ree! Take a high-headed gal with snappy black eyes and match her with a up-standin' buck with yaller hair, and mistah—what I mean, you got you a team that's powerful hard to beat."

Up-standin', hell!"

"Shore 'nuff," declared the old man. He looked critically at Skyline's long, clean-shaven face, and went on to say, "It takes a man with bottom to sprout a mustache like that'n Flash is a-packin'."

Skyline Jackson disdainfully flipped a cigarette butt in the general direction of the Medina River, which flowed placidly along at the foot of a slope a hundred yards away on the left.

"Uh-huh," he drawled, "and I done noticed that hair sprouts on a heap of things, mules and polecats and sheriffs."

Kickapoo Joe chuckled down deep in his chest like an amused buffalo. He ran an appraising eye over his young deputy's angular frame, then switched his attention to the big blond man on the hotel verandah.

"Flash don't pack no taller," he observed, "but he's got meat on his bones. I like to see a fella keep hisself in shape thataway."

Skyline grinned down his long nose at the sheriff. "You ain't got no call to talk. Yo' skellytin has done outgrowed yo' hide."

Old Kick acted as if he didn't hear the remark. He cogitated aloud, "Shore hope Flash sprouts some roots in Bandera. He told Jessie he calc'lated he might."

Hard to tell what Skyline meant. "He might."

"I know for a fact," continued the sheriff, "that he's a-dickerin' for the Kroska place. Shook cash money under the old man's nose."

This was news to the red-headed deputy. He shot a suspicious glance at the old-timer, then stared hard at the well-dressed man across the street. He knew that Kickapoo Joe North was as slick as they made 'em, and it would be just like the ornery cuss to pass out a warning in this roundabout fashion. Now what in hell would a jasper like Flash Harrigan want with a little two-thousand-acre ranch in a sober, hard-working community like Bandera?

Of course, there was Jessie North.

Skyline thought of some very good cuss words.

NO TELLING what else he might have thought of, had it not been for an interruption which temporarily upset things. At a point four hundred yards north where the trail crawled over a gentle rise on its way into town, there suddenly appeared a spring wagon drawn by a team of ponies and accompanied by five riders. Spring wagons and riders were common sights in Bandera, but the manner in which this outfit was behaving reminded Skyline of his own escapades in wild prairie cow-towns. Whooping and yelling, they tore down the easy slope at a run. The driver held the lines in one hand and flourished his whip with the other, making no effort to avoid rocks and chuck holes which frequently had all four wheels of the wagon in the air.

"Now what?" growled Old Kick.

"Jest a-feelin' they oats, I reckon," observed the lanky redhead. "Out in the Devil's River country we'd make them rannies look plumb slow when we hit town."

Old Auntie Polka had a big dominique rooster who often ranged up and down the road in front of her log cabin. He was out there now, rassling a grasshopper,

and he ended his days beneath a pony's hooves.

Pop Schneider had some pigs who ran at large, fattening on the public domain. They chose the wrong time to cross the road, but all of them made it with one exception—a little black shoat. One pony and two wheels of the wagon got him.

This slaughter seemed to go to the riders' heads. Where the trail changed its name to Main Street, they jerked out their guns and let them off at the sky. Bandera was a stranger to such hilarious doings. Gunplay in this town had always signified that serious business was afoot. Nobody ran, everybody cautiously took steps to investigate. More than one old Indian fighter showed up with a rifle in his hand, and the light of battle in his eye.

THE obstreperous newcomers tore down Main Street as if they aimed to keep right on going, over the hill and into the Medina; and when he got a good look at 'em, Skyline sort of hoped they'd do it. A tough bunch and more or less tight was the way he sized them up. He figured they must have a jug in the wagon with their bedding rolls.

However, with a final whoop and a few parting shots at the sun, they slid to a halt in a cloud of dust. The driver expertly whipped the wagon around on two wheels, over to the C & H rack.

While this was taking place, Skyline gravely turned to Kickapoo Joe. "Well, sah," he drawled, "you're the sheriff of Bandera County."

The old-timer sharply eyed the gang as they swung their ponies in to the rack and stepped off. He meditatively fingered the nigh side of his mustache, glanced up and down the street, then cocked a humorous eye at the young bronc rider whom he had converted into an officer of the law.

"Mmmm-huh, reckon I'm the sheriff all right," he allowed, "but lately I been feelin' mighty porely, so I done quit sheriffin' for a short spell. You're a deppity, even if you ain't got brains enough to pack yo' six-shooters."

Skyline Jackson grinned and hitched up his breeches.

Old Kick slapped the holster on his thigh. "Want mine?"

"Nope. It's too damned rusty."

While the newcomers were loosening cinches and straightening saddle blankets, he looked them over individually. The driver of the team—a cook, no doubt—proved to be a dried up runt with watery eyes and a mournful face. He was drunk and unsteady on his feet, and obviously proud of it. Four of the remaining five looked to be cowhands of the wild, turbulent variety such as find their way into many outfits. They were just tight enough to be happy or quarrelsome, depending upon how they were handled.

But the fifth, apparently the leader, was a different proposition entirely. A burly individual with unkempt black beard and hair that hid his ears, he looked and acted the part of a bully. He carried his liquor better than his younger companions, and when his mean little eyes met Skyline's they were steady and thoroughly alive to what was going on.

The young deputy was on edge. Since the sheriff had given him the job of policing Bandera, this was his first opportunity to show the stuff he was made of. He felt that everybody liked him; but nevertheless, he had been freely criticized because he usually went unarmed. He now knew that the eyes of the town were upon him and some of these critics were no doubt laughing at his predicament. Fact of the matter was, he admitted that the joke was

on him and he didn't much blame 'em for laughing.

He glanced briefly at the hotel verandah. Jessie waved a hand at him, and she said something. "Oh, Skyline, be careful!" was the way he understood it. That helped.

He grinned and stepped down from the porch while the visitors were still tinkering around their saddles. The drunken cook had tied his team and staggered under the rack. He now stood with his back against it and his elbows hooked over it to lighten the load on his wobbly legs.

SKYLINE put out his big hand. "Howdy, stranger," he drawled. "Powerful mean weather we're havin', ain't it?"

The cook offered a limp hand at the end of a floppy wrist. He shook his head and blinked his eyes; then he closed one of them and regarded the big deputy owlishly with the other.

"Wet-wettest damned weather I ever seen," he hiccupped, "and I know I'm a-headin' for a watery grave."

Skyline chuckled. Behind him he heard Old Kick's booming laugh.

The cook braced himself, let an eye wander uncertainly up and down Skyline's lanky frame, and burst out, "Say! What in hell are you d-doin' up here in the hills?"

"Jest a-tryin' my durndest to make a honest livin'," answered the deputy. "Why?"

"'C-cause you ain't no goat. You're a longhawn, same as me!" He stuck out his hand with alcoholic gravity. "Shake! Shake with H-happy Jack, the best damned cook that ever boilt a bean or burnt a biscuit!"

By this time the cook's companions had come over, and he proceeded to introduce them. Skyline shook hands with each of the men, giving his name and adding, "From the Devil's River country."

Black Gene Doak, the leader, folded his arms and teetered back on his heels. "From Devil's River, eh?" He stroked his whiskers and chuckled. "Up here for yo' health, I betcha."

What he said was all right as far as Skyline Jackson was concerned; but the way in which he said it, clearly indicated that the big fellow was dying to pick a fuss. The deputy dryly said to himself that Black Gene didn't need to go to all that trouble. They'd have plenty to fuss about in a minute.

"That's it exactly," he readily admitted. "And so's to sorta help me git back my strength, I got me a job as deppity sheriff. And what I mean—ever since I landed this here job, I been recuperatin' powerful fast."

HAPPY JACK clawed at his bedraggled old hat which looked as if it had fanned many a fire. He waved it over his head and bellowed in a voice out of all proportion to his size, "Wahoo! A longhawn deppity! L-lock me up and lemme die in a dungeon cell!"

Gene Doak said nothing. He appeared to be slightly flabbergasted by the knowledge that he had met up with the law so soon.

With one eye on the big man, Skyline told the hilarious cook, "Nope, don't aim to lock you up 'cause the county is too pore to feed you. But I figger you boys has got some damages to pay."

"What damages?" growled Black Gene. "We ain't damaged nothin'—yet."

The lanky redhead pointed up the trail with a long arm and a bony finger. "Back yander a piece, you damaged a old rooster somethin' scandalous and you plumb ruint a likely shoat." Skyline grinned amiably. "Fact is, you killed both of 'em."

The big man snorted disgustedly. "Huh! A rooster and a pig!" He shoved a hand into his pocket with a lordly air. "How much?"

T. C. Jackson scraped his long jaw and pondered the matter. "W-l-l, lemme see.

Roosters, 'specially old roosters, is mighty hard to raise in this here hill country, and—"

"How much?"

"Oh-h, I calc'late two dollahs is 'bout what the rooster was damaged."

"Oh, Lawdy!" groaned Happy Jack. "Fellas, if we're stuck in this blasted country from now on—mind you, we don't eat no chicken 'cept what we can steal."

Black Gene muttered an oath, but he handed over the two dollars.

"Thank you, sah," said Skyline courteously, "and now if the rest of you boys will jest ante up yo' damage money, I'll—"

"Two dollars apiece?" bellowed Doak. "Twelve dollars for a damned old rooster. We'll see you in hell befo'—"

The genial redhead interrupted him. "Shore wish I was that quick at figgers," he drawled. "Make 'aste, fellas. Gimme yo' damages."

As Skyline had hoped they would, the four hands saw the humor of the situation and paid without a murmur. The drunken cook got out his money, but he had to put up an argument.

"Befo' I help to pay twelve dollars for ary rooster," he growled, "I gotta know somethin' 'bout him. What breed of a rooster was this'n we damaged?"

"A domminicker."

"Huh! Domminickers don't make good roosters."

"Far as Yankee roosters is consarned, you're dead right," admitted Skyline, "but this'n was a immigrant chicken."

Happy Jack looked utterly mystified.

"Yes, sah, you see it's like this," continued the deputy. "Old Auntie Polka carried that there rooster all the way across the water from—from Domminick?"

"Where in hell is Domminick?"

"Rooshia, you durned idjit!"

Happy Jack paid the two dollars. "All I gotta say is—I'm damned glad she didn't fetch him from Chiny."

"Chiny? Oh, shore. That's where the shoat come from."

IT TOOK a lot of humorous argument and some diplomacy to get an additional two dollars apiece from Black Gene Doak and each of his men, but Skyline eventually got it.

By adopting this painless method of punishing these toughs, the big deputy knew he had disappointed those of the spectators who hoped and expected to see a fight; but it made no difference to him. Having lived all his life on the frontier, he had seen enough unnecessary bloodshed to make him heartily sick of it. He wouldn't admit he was cowardly because he preferred a joke and a laugh or sometimes a good hard fist, to gunsmoke and lead and men crippled or buried.

However, when the easy-going young horseman saw no way around it, he buckled on his guns and shot to kill; and those who had seen him in action, swore that few men could make a six-shooter perform as he did.

At this moment, Skyline knew that the toughest part of this job remained to be done. In the interests of safety, he had to disarm these fellows. After a few more drinks, in all probability they'd set out to show this strange town what wild and woolly bad men they were and no telling what would happen. He wasn't worried about the four hands and Happy Jack. He had ridden many a trail with men of their type, drank from the same bottle and slept in the same blankets with them, so he knew how to handle the ornery rascals. Black Gene was his problem. The big cuss had a warped sense of humor and a large opinion of himself, and to be ridiculed before witnesses was a painful blow to his self esteem. Moreover, he was naturally an evil tempered brute.

So T. C. Jackson drew a long breath, grinned in his friendliest manner, and spoke his piece in a voice that was humorous but mighty firm.

"Out in the Devil's River country where I cut my teeth," he drawled, "any old time a town makes some pore cuss pay damages, he pays jest like you done; then he cuts loose and does his durndest to git his money's wuth out'n the daggoned place. That's the way us Devil's River boys git square with 'em, but it don't go in Bandera. These here folks pocket his damages, then they sell him all the liquor he wants but they make him hang up his shootin' irons until he sorta cools off."

SKYLINE'S grin widened a trifle. It appeared to be directed at each of the newcomers as he continued in the most casual fashion, "So you can jest give 'em to me now, then come over to the jail in the mawnin' and git 'em."

He wound up looking straight at Happy Jack, but from the side of his eye he saw Gene Doak jam his fists onto his hips and set his jaw.

Happy didn't have a sign of a weapon in sight. Nevertheless, Skyline held out his hand and said, "Gimme."

The old cook was the picture of woe. He seemed at the point of bursting into tears. He dolefully shook his head. "'Way back yander in the fo'ties when I wa'n't much more'n a long three, I shot my pore old pappy accidental-like 'cause he h'isted my shirt tail and set me afire with a shingle. Killed him daid. Then while we was a-buryin' pore pappy, damned if I didn't up and blow my grandpappy's gizzard out 'cause he allowed it was too bad pore pappy didn't git shot five six year befo' I was bawned. Ever sence then I been powerful gunshy. Don't never pack the thing."

On the store porch, Old Kick exploded a mighty laugh and several other men joined in. The big deputy chuckled, but he continued to hold out his hand.

"Happy Jack, you're a man after my own heart," he drawled, "'cause I figger you're the damnedest liar in Texas. Jest you gimme that there hoss-pistol you got stuck down inside yo' shirt onderneath yo' britches, and make shore you don't noways forgit the knife you're a-totin' in yo' boot. Betcha it's two feet long if it's a inch."

Happy Jack wiped his eyes. He ran a hand inside his greasy hickory shirt and extracted the old pistol as if it were an ulcerated tooth; then he reached down and pulled the butcher knife from his boot-top as tenderly as if it were buried in his flesh.

"Here, take 'em," he moaned. "Now jest kick me out into a sinful world, and lemme die the death of a pore defenseless soul. Where in hell can a fella git him a dram of that there Bandera liquor?"

Skyline handed the knife and pistol to Kickapoo Joe, and told the cook, "Right behind the store in old George Hay's saloon. He keeps a Bible on the backbar and he'll dish you up a drink or a sermon, don't make no difference to George."

THE red-headed deputy turned his attention to the four hands. They were lined up against the rack, laughing at the antics of their drunken cook; and there was nothing unfriendly in the way they regarded the good-natured bronc twister when he asked them for their weapons. He had talked to them man-to-man in their language, and plainly they figured he was one of their kind—merely doing this job because he had to. They unbuckled their belts without a word, studiously avoiding the scornful glances of Black Gene who stood at the end of the line facing the deputy.

Skyline passed the four gunbelts back to Old Kick.

"What the—?" growled the sheriff. "Jest you keep on a-loadin' me down with pistols and you'll git me so daggoned mad I'll shoot the town up myownself."

"Shore wish you would. For a long time I been a-honin' to lock a sheriff in his own jail."

"Me, too," mumbled Happy Jack.

Still laughing at the cook, Skyline stepped up to within three feet of Black Gene. He put out his left hand this time. His wide shoulders seemed to slouch a little so that his right hung away down his thigh, almost to his knee.

"Know jest how you feel, Mistah Doak," he drawled quietly, "and I'm mighty sorry. But I gotta have 'em, both of 'em."

Confronted by an unarmed man smaller than himself, and with an audience to boot—here was a situation made to order for a man like Black Gene. He expanded noticeably.

"If you figger you're man enough, jest take 'em," he growled with his thumbs

hooked in his belt near the handles of his guns. "You're smart enough not to go heeled, so a fella cain't drill you like he'd oughta, but I can shore pistol-whip the daylights out'n you if—"

This was one time when Skyline Jackson got all set and hit a man with every ounce of strength he had. He knew it wouldn't do to fool with the bully. After the first blow was struck the fellow would forget all about not shooting an unarmed man, so he had to knock him out. The red-headed deputy's fist was large enough and bony and toughened by hard work. It traveled a long way and it stopped with a terrific jar, squarely in the middle of Black Gene's whiskers. His head snapped back as if his neck was broken, then his knees crumpled and he went down on his face.

Blowing on his knuckles, Skyline used his left hand to get the big man's guns.

For the space of five seconds, not a sound came from either side of the street. Executed so quickly and coming so unexpectedly, it almost seemed that the blow struck everybody dumb.

HAPPY JACK was first to recover. His maudlin voice boomed out, "Hallelujah!" Leetle David done beefed Goliath with the jawbone of a jackass! I crave liquor."

Laughter arose on every hand. Skyline caught a glimpse of Jessie hurrying across the street toward him, laughing. Also he saw Flash Harrigan walking rapidly along the path that served as a sidewalk to where his California sorrel was tied in front of Huffmeyer's store. For an instant he wondered where Flash was going so fast, and why.

Happy Jack began to fumble with the neckropes that held his team, shaking his head and talking to himself.

"Fixin' to leave town?" inquired Skyline.

"Not p-permanent," answered the cook. He called out to the hands, "Jest pitch pore Gene into the w-waggin, fellas, and we'll haul him to the boneyard and p-put the sod over him. Make 'aste, 'cause I'm a-dyin' to git me a dram."

Whitey Tompkins was holding the big man in a sitting position while one of the others sloshed water over his face with a bandanna, dipped in a fire barrel that stood on the porch.

Whitey looked up at Happy Jack and laughed. "Gene ain't dead, you durned simpleton."

The cook went right on untying his team. "Don't make a p-particle of difference," he growled. "Whenever ary man gits busted that hard, if he ain't daid he'd oughta be. We don't take no chances with pore Gene. We plant him quick, 'cause if he's daid he's so daggoned ornery he's shore to sp'ile befo' mawnin'."

Kickapoo Joe North sat down on the edge of the porch with his arms full of belts and guns, rocking with laughter.

The red-headed deputy's efforts to convince Happy Jack that they should give Black Gene a chance to recover, kept everybody in an uproar. The old cook stubbornly stuck to the opinion that no man could take such a wallop and live. They were still arguing about it when Doak came to and felt of his jaw; and even then, Happy Jack was frankly skeptical.

He looked hard, brushed a hand across his eyes, shook his head, and looked again. "I'll be—! Resurrected from the daid, so help me, and the water done it. Gimme a dram of that there Bandera water!"

CHAPTER II

THE FIGHTING PARSON

ON THE following morning nothing tasted good to Skyline Jackson—neither Colonel Duffy's famous breakfast, nor the cigarette that followed it.

From a chair tilted back against the wall on the first-floor veranda of the hotel, he stared moodily down a grassy slope at the beautiful green Medina and said to himself, it wasn't much of a river. The cypress, hackberry, elm, pecan, maple—proud trees whose roots it bathed in return for the shade they gave it, nothin' pretty about 'em—just a hideout for panther and bear and cats and horse thieves, and such.

Horse thieves and such—he had 'em on his mind this morning.

The wall behind him pushed his hat to the high, sharp bridge of his nose and he left it there. From beneath its wide brim he gazed sourly out across the level meadow bordering the river, inside the horseshoe with which it partially enclosed Bandera; a velvety cushion of grass, ornamented at intervals by feathery mesquites and oaks with waxy leaves; a natural park, left unoccupied because every twenty years or so, the frisky Medina frolicked across it; just a sorry flat with a little old wall tent—patched and greasy—crouching in a triangle of liveoaks out there in the middle of it.

And inside of the tent, Black Gene Doak and his boys were a-sleepin' off the drunk which they had finished up last night in grand style; but before starting out, they had gone into camp as if they aimed to stay awhile; which was just one of the things affecting Skyline's taste for victuals this morning.

He had ridden a pretty close herd on the boys last night, sort of hoping for an excuse to run 'em out of town; but all they did was to get honestly drunk, whoop, sing, jig, and buy drinks for a number of Bandera's Class Z citizens who always made it a point to be around when such festivities were in progress. Black Gene even went as far as to buy him a drink, shake hands, and swear it was all a mistake.

And this morning T. C. Jackson secretly admitted that it probably was a mistake, his mistake for not hazing 'em on across the river toward Hondo or Castroville when they first hit town.

The fact that mighty near the whole town came to him yesterday evening and told him what an elegant job he did by taming the boys without bloodshed, made him feel just that much worse this morning. These Bandera folks put too much trust in their law officers, and Kickapoo Joe had too damned much faith in him. The folks went to bed and went to sleep with their doors unlocked, and Old Kick took Jessie home to the Dead Indian and played poker until midnight with a few old cronies; at least, he said he was going to.

NOBODY bothered his head about why this bunch of tough hands had lit in Bandera, or why Flash Harrigan left town so soon after they rolled in. Jessie said he told her that he was on his way to spend the night with old man Kroska, to see if he couldn't wind up the deal for the ranch. Maybeso, reflected the red-headed

deputy, but it wasn't natural for a fellow like Flash to run off when there was still a chance for him to watch a mighty pretty fight. He didn't know that Black Gene was going to stay down, and if the big boy had've gotten up there sure would've been a fight. Skyline thought he smelled a rat, but he didn't know where to look for the thing.

He snapped his half-smoked cigarette at a yellow-breasted finch no larger than his thumb, who was singing him a mighty catchy tune from the bottom limb of a maple sapling ten feet away. Skyline had seen the time when he could listen all day to one of those little rascals, but he didn't like 'em this morning. Made him think of the Bandera folks. Right down there underneath the sapling lay the Colonel's old black tomcat, a-makin' out to doze; but he had one eye on the bird, and the cocky little singer didn't pay him no mind. More'n likely the finch figured a deputy sheriff wouldn't let a tomcat get him.

Skyline slowly uncoiled from his chair. He jerked his hat down over one eye, and scowled at the tent out there on the flat. Afterwards, he ambled up the street to his little two-by-four office in the front part of the jail. He went in and sat down, and did an extra job of cleaning and oiling his guns.

While in the act of reloading them he heard some horses coming, but he didn't pay much attention until they stopped in front of his door. He looked out and saw Kickapoo Joe North on the big dappled gray he sometimes rode, and Jessie on a salty little dun which Skyline had named "Streak" when he gentled the cuss for her.

Streak didn't have a speck of use for the side-saddle she was riding or the long black skirt she wore over her bright green riding habit; and the little pony showed his feelings by the disgusted look in his large, intelligent eyes and the sudden way in which he carried his little ears—one-half way forward and the other halfway back, both slanted out at a wide angle to his head. As far as the side-saddle and skirt were concerned, Skyline sympathized with Streak; but the onery little heathen ought to be mighty proud to carry a girl like her, regardless of how she rode or what she wore.

IN THE estimation of this homely bronc twister, there never was anything half as pretty as Jessie North on a horse—side or stock saddle, it didn't make a particle of difference. Wearing a close-fitting bodice and long tight sleeves that disappeared in a pair of gauntlets with a small green star on the cuffs, she looked just as slender as any city girl he ever saw; but he knew she wasn't timid or weak like they seemed to be, for he had seen her small hands and slim arms set a horse down with a grazing bit. He didn't know much about hats, except Stetsons and hard-boiled hats and stovepipes, but the tricky little thing she had on top of her load of coal-black hair sure looked mighty cute to Skyline Jackson this morning.

"Mawnin', boy!" boomed the white-haired sheriff, swinging out of the saddle as spry as a four-year-old. "'Pears to me you ain't daid nor crippled down none to speak of. How come?"

Skyline spoke to Jessie and her father, but he didn't immediately answer the old man's question. He was helping the girl to dismount, and as usual he was tongue-tied when that close to her. It always made him all-fired mad at himself, but to save his neck he couldn't help it. She stepped out of her riding skirt and he tossed it across the saddle, securing it there by hooking the stirrup over a horn with part of the skirt beneath it. The bashful young horseman tried to hide his embarrassment by thumbing Streak in the paunch and watching him kick; then he ruffled up the pony's ears and laughed when the little devil took a playful nip at him.

From a short distance away, Jessie watched these maneuvers with laughter in her large, dark eyes and a twitching at the corners of her generous mouth. When Skyline turned to face her, she looked closely at him as if trying to count his freckles—a man-sized job.

"Have any trouble last night?" she inquired in a soft contralto. "Don't you lie to me, Big Fellow."

Skyline dropped his eyes. He smoothed a little patch of sand with the sole of his boot. "Wel-l-l," he drawled, "I *did* put in kind of a tough night."

Instantly both Jessie and her father showed genuine concern. They kept silent, waiting.

The tall deputy took off his old hat and made a pretense of reshaping it. "They wa'n't a-packin' six-shooters, but they're knifers from away back."

Jessie bit her lip. She looked fearfully at Skyline as if searching for hidden wounds. Kickapoo Joe muttered something under his breath.

The lanky redhead put on his hat, pulled it down low, and glanced shyly at the girl from the shadow of its brim. "All on account of this daggoned south wind we been havin'. It brung scads of skeeters up from the Gulf, and if the Cuhnel don't put a new screen on my winder I'll—"

"Durn yo' onery hide!" exploded Old Kick. "I'm a mind to flatten yo' eye for you!"

Jessie burst into a peal of laughter that had a ring of relief as well as mirth.

KICKAPOO JOE turned on her, obviously trying to look dangerous and making a fizzle of it. "And you too! You drag me out'n my bed befo' day when I'm a-needin' my rest powerful bad, and you haze me into town without no breakfast. If you was a boy, I'd—"

"Be askeerd of her jest like you are now," drawled Skyline. "Come on in and set for a spell."

Before they reached the door, Old Kick called a halt and pointed to a rider coming into town from the southwest. As Jessie and Skyline turned to look, the the man met Auntie Schlimmer and stopped to talk to the old lady less than a hundred yards away.

Kickapoo Joe took off his hat, ran a hand through his heavy white hair, and chuckled, "Old Satan better fork his bronc and hit for the tall timbers, 'cause here come the pahson."

"Bully!" exclaimed Skyline. "This here town shore needs a pahson 'bout now."

A single glance at the newcomer was sure to catch and hold the interest of anyone. Built for service rather than looks—his horse was a high, rangy roan with skimpy mane and tail, and a Roman nose. His saddle and bridle were old and held together at various places by rawhide

thongs. Behind the cantle rode a pair of huge saddle bags, weathered and cracked and filled to the bursting point. In front of the horn on the pommel and extending out over the horse's withers and down its shoulders, a blanket roll was tied. A morral hung from the horn on the right side, from which protruded the handle of a skillet to which was tied a battered and blackened coffee pot. A rifle rode in a scabbard beneath the rider's left leg, and his coat failed to hide the cartridge belt about his waist.

In the way the man sat his horse, there was that indescribable something which tells of years in the saddle. Of medium height—about five feet seven, he would weigh in the neighborhood of one hundred

and fifty to fifty-five and carried a good part of it above his hips. A dark blue or black coat fitted somewhat loosely on his sloping shoulders, and trousers of the same color were worn inside the high tops of his boots.

"Huh!" grunted Skyline. "That there jasper looks more like a fightin' man than a pahson."

"He *is*—both of 'em," declared Kickapoo Joe. "Ain't you never heard tell of Andrew Jackson Potter, the fightin' pahson?"

"Sartinly, I done heard a heap of things 'bout him, but it don't never pay a fella to believe all he hears in Texas."

"Maybeso," admitted Old Kick, "but you're plumb safe in believin' every last thing you hear 'bout Pahson Potter, pervidin' it's good."

SKYLINE watched the preacher tip his hat to the old lady and start toward the jail. "How come he's in Bandera, I wonder?"

Jessie spoke up. "He lives between here and Boerne, but we don't see much of him because he's generally away—riding his circuit or off some place with one of his visiting church officials. They like to have him along as guard in wild country."

Old Kick went out to the rack in front of the jail before the parson got there, waved his hand, and boomed irreverently, "Howdy, Pahson, you old son-of-a-gun! Fall off and preach me a sarmon."

The big roan came on to the rack. Through a heavy black beard with a reddish tinge, the preacher's strong teeth showed in a wide smile. He took off his broad-brimmed black hat and bowed to Jessie.

For a moment Skyline looked into a pair of bright blue eyes that were famous up and down the frontier for their clarity, sharpness, and penetrating glances.

"Howdy, folks," said Parson Potter in a rich, resonant voice. He swung out of the saddle and reached across the rack to shake hands with the sheriff. "I've seen the time when I'd rather preach Kickapoo Joe's funeral for nothin', than to preach a sermon for money."

Old Kick threw back his head and laughed.

The preacher took down his neck-rope and the sheriff tied his horse. In the meantime, they went right on saying insulting things to each other and getting lots of fun out of it.

Parson Potter produced a half dollar and said, "Before I forget it, Kick, here's the fo'-bits I owe you."

Kickapoo Joe scarcely glanced at the money. He shook his head. "Keep it. My old spotted hound got a dose of pizen and I figger he's due to cash in most any day now. I think a heap of that there dog and I want you to preach him a ripsnortin' funeral. Fo'-bits oughta be 'bout right."

The parson gravely pocketed the coin. He kept a perfectly straight face, an easy thing for him to do. "Fair enough, but we'll just wait until you die and I'll preach 'em both at once."

They came to where Jessie and Skyline were standing. Parson Potter completely ignored the big deputy. Again he bared his black head, shook hands with the girl, and favored her with the winning smile that often did so much to reassure those who were uneasy when his peculiar, very light-colored eyes were upon them.

"Miss Jessie," he said in a deep, solemn voice, "one of the mysteries of Creation is how a scamp as homely and triflin' as Kickapoo Joe North can raise a girl as sweet and pretty as you."

Jessie laughed, thanked him appropriately, and turned to introduce Skyline.

Parson Potter interrupted her with a startled exclamation. He stared in amazement at the lanky redhead as if he had suddenly discovered the man, and recognized him.

"Skyline Jackson, the Devil's River

Terror, so help me!" he exclaimed. "When did the governor parole you?"

With great difficulty, Skyline pulled a long face and pretended to think. "Mmm, lemme see, Pahson. It'll be six months come Sunday."

THEY both laughed and shook hands with the enthusiasm of old friends who had long been separated.

So Parson Potter and Skyline Jackson had their little joke. Of course the young deputy had recognized the preacher instantly, and the latter afterwards admitted that he had spotted the tall bronc rider the moment he laid eyes on him.

Jessie leaned against the side of the door and laughed at her father until her eyes were swimming.

Old Kick suddenly burst out. "Say, you! Bend a ear to this! I'll git square with you two varmints, if it takes me the balance of my days and every last thing I own. Don't you forgit it!"

After the mirth subsided, laughter to which the old sheriff contributed more volume than anyone else, Skyline described how he first met the parson. Chased by a band of Lipans, cornered in a box canyon, badly wounded, his horse dead and his ammunition about gone—he lay there behind a rock and watched a man shoot his way through the Indians, and come to his rescue. That man was Parson Potter.

Over the preacher's objections, he went on to tell how the parson kept him from bleeding to death and kept him alive until they reached a doctor—Skyline on the preacher's horse, the preacher walking and leading it.

In conclusion, the young deputy drawled, "So you cain't blame me for bein' powerful glad to see the pahson every time I meet up with him."

Potter poked him in the ribs with his fist. "The big rascal clean forgot to tell you how he went out and bought the horse I'm ridin', gentled it, and gave it to me."

"By the way—how is Old Cactus?" asked Skyline. "I can see he's a-gittin' uglier."

"Cactus has saved my hide more'n once. In a long chase, he's the toughest horse I ever rode."

"Huh! He oughta be. He was about the rankest bronc I ever forked."

THEY went into the office and talked for a long time. Skyline never tired of listening to Parson Potter, and he knew this to be true of everyone who met the frontier preacher—good men or bad men, it made no difference. Between the ages of ten and sixteen, a jockey at a time when men and boys in the racing game had to be tough; then a bullwhacker on the Santa Fe Trail in a day when the men of the trail often were as savage as the Indians they had to fight; later a gambler, a hard-drinking fighting man, a cowman, and a trail driver; afterwards turning over a new leaf to become an impoverished rancher, an excellent Indian fighter, and a fine preacher—Andrew Jackson Potter was distinctly a part of the frontier, knew its people, talked its language, and had its respect.

Along toward noon, Skyline glanced through a window and saw Black Gene Doak coming with the four hands. Of course they were after their weapons, and he was glad they chose this particular time to make their call. He looked thoughtfully at the parson for a moment, thinking that perhaps no man in the country knew more frontier characters than this circuit-ridin' preacher.

"Pahson," he said casually, "jest take a peek through the winder and see whether you know any of them five fellas."

The parson moved around to where he could see them. During the space of a breath, his strange eyes fitted the description a good old lady once gave them, "When Brother Potter is riled, he's got eyes like a glass-eyed filly."

He returned to his chair. "I knew lots

of men in this western country, Skyline, both good and bad."

A cryptic statement, but it told the deputy a plenty. The parson knew at least one of those men, and knew nothing good about him; but Potter would keep this knowledge to himself. Far and wide it was known that he never betrayed a confidence, that honest men confided in him and bad men told him their troubles.

Black Gene came to the door. He stopped with a hand upon either side of it and his foot on the threshold. His bloodshot eyes darted quickly about the room until they came to the parson. There they hung for a moment.

Skyline watched the two men intently. There was nothing friendly in the way they looked at each other. He'd swear they had met before, and more than likely they'd had trouble.

Declining an invitation to come in, Black Gene was neither hostile nor sociable. He merely said they didn't have time, and that they'd like to get their gunbelts.

Skyline gave him the weapons, inquiring whether he wanted to take Happy Jack's also. Whitey stuck his head through the door, under the big man's arm.

"Happy Jack said to tell you to keep the daggoned things," drawled the hand with a broad grin. "Old Happy allows he's askeerd to go heeled in ary town where you pack the law. Likewise, he says to tell you he had him a extry knife in the wagon and he stole a six-shooter last night."

PARSON POTTER joined in the laughter that followed. After a glance through the window to make sure that Doak and his men were out of hearing, he inquired, "Is this Happy Jack a little dried-up codger who looks like he's ready to cry about somethin'?"

Upon being told that Happy answered that description, he chuckled quietly, then continued, "That old devil is the best range cook in Texas when he's half tight, but I'm sorry to say that when he's sober his grub would kill a horse."

Suspecting that Happy Jack had a lot of lawless history behind him, Skyline knew it would be a waste of breath to ask questions about him. Evidently Jessie and Old Kick felt the same way about it, for they, too, kept silent—waiting for the preacher to go on.

From a pocket in his vest, Parson Potter extracted a piece of corn husk cut to the size and shape of a cigarette paper; also a bag of granulated tobacco. He rolled himself a smoke as expertly as a Mexican vaquero might have done. His coat pocket yielded a little blue cardboard box with the picture of an alligator on it, from which he took a sulphur match, struck it, held it at arm's length until it got through spluttering, then lit his cigarette.

He leaned back in his chair, inhaled with genuine pleasure, and turned his cold blue eyes accusingly upon Kickapoo Joe. "I'm a-lookin' at a sheriff who is unfaithful to his trust."

"I know it," drawled Old Kick, "but jest as long as the voters don't find it out, everything's hunkydory."

Potter continued as if the sheriff hadn't spoken.

"Two weeks ago, I preached in San Saba. Mighty fine, hard-workin' folks up there and they seem to be gettin' along right well, except for the trouble they been havin' with horse thieves."

Skyline pricked up his ears.

"I happen to know that many of their horses are goin' south," continued the parson, "because a while back when I was a-ridin' the Uvalde circuit with the Presidin' Elder, I saw a crew of five men and a wagon shovin' a band of San Saba horses toward the border just as fast as they could travel. I recognized some of the brands and thought at the time that they might be stolen stuff."

OLD KICK'S rugged face had a devilish look. "And I betcha you recognized some of the thieves, too."

Parson Potter didn't turn a hair. "I know lots of horse thieves in Texas, some who honestly admit they're thieves and others who're a-holdin' office."

"Powerful interestin'," said the sheriff with a touch of sarcasm, "but how in—hallelujah does it make a onfaithful critter out'n me?"

"You know this country like you know the sins on your own conscience," retorted the preacher, "so you ought to be able to figure that the most likely route for thieves to trail their stuff south, is through Bandera Pass and across this county. A-standin' on edge the way it does, this is fine country for the thieves to hole up and rest their herds a few days before makin' a dash for the border."

Parson Potter flipped the ash from his cigarette, onto the floor. "Course you know all this, but you're too triflin' to do anything about it."

Very close friends, each of whom held the other in the highest esteem—the preacher and the sheriff nevertheless went at it hammer and tongs for a while, to the amusement of Skyline and Jessie. Old Kick made no bones about accusing Parson Potter of being in league with the thieves because he wouldn't identify a single one of them. The preacher defended himself by saying that in times past he had camped with them, fought Indians elbow-to-elbow with them, preached to them, and buried them; that they trusted him and most of them treated him squarely, so he wouldn't betray their faith in him by helping a law officer who was too sorry to help himself.

At length Kickapoo Joe brought the argument to a close by telling the preacher that he'd buy his dinner at the hotel. Parson Potter went outside and got his Winchester. He stood it in the corner with Skyline's rifle, and he hung his gunbelt on the wall,

Old Kick watched all this, grinning slyly. Presently he stroked the nigh side of his mustache and drawled soberly, "Pahson, I recollect that som'eres in the Scriptures it says to let a fella bust you on both cheeks, so how come all the hardware?"

"There weren't any Indians where that was written," snapped the preacher. "Miss Jessie, may I accompany you to the dinin' room, away from these blasphemous men?"

As they were drawing close to the hotel, the parson and Jessie in the lead, Skyline looked over their heads and caught sight of Flash Harrigan on the

side verandah, facing Main Street. He wished they'd walk faster. He didn't want Flash to get away before they got there. He wanted to see what happened when Parson Potter met up with the big sport.

Flash stood his ground. When Jessie and the preacher reached the steps, he left his chair and went to meet them all smiles. The girl began an introduction.

Harrigan spoke up quickly, "Thank you, Miss North, but I been knowin' Parson Potter for a long time."

He offered his hand with a polite bow. The parson shook hands and made some casual remark, but he didn't smile. Skyline was careful to stand where he could watch the faces of both men. He saw the preacher's eyes again turn to highly polished glass. He saw Flash Harrigan's smile lose some of its warmth.

"Mighty glad to meet up with you, Harrigan," said Parson Potter. "One of your men—I think it was Slim Cutting—got a fine Morgan mare from Widow Sommers

up Menard way and the last time I saw her she told me she hadn't been paid for the mare. The old lady is needin' the money powerful bad, a hundred fifty dollars I think it was. Any idea where I can find Slim?"

Flash Harrigan's florid face took on more color. "I'll be—!" he exclaimed. "Wait until I lay hands on that cuss. You don't need to go to no more bother, Pahson. I'll give you what he's owin' the old lady right now, then I'll take it outa Slim's hide if he hasn't got the cash next time I see him."

The preacher gravely counted the money Harrigan gave him. "I must say you're behavin' plumb square about this," he declared. "Widow Sommers will be mighty grateful, I can tell you."

WHILE the parson was speaking, Flash resumed his jaunty air, squaring his shoulders as if they had suddenly been relieved of a heavy burden. Skyline Jackson felt an urge to slap the preacher on the back. In all probability he had been tracing this stolen horse for a long time, merely to help someone who needed help; and having found out who got it, he handled the matter in the smoothest possible fashion. The young deputy figured there wasn't any "Slim Cutting." If there had been, the parson wouldn't have mentioned his name.

At the moment things looked bad for Flash Harrigan, and T. C. Jackson had an appetite for dinner.

After the meal, Jessie went to the store and the three men took chairs on the front verandah to smoke. Skyline noticed that before he sat down, the parson seemed to be looking for something on the flat.

And one of the first things he said was, "Ever since I got here, I've been waitin' for you fellows to say something about the preachin', but you haven't mentioned it and I see an old tent down there where they always build the arbor. I wonder how come?"

"What preachin'?" asked Old Kick.

Parson Potter shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. "I might've known it. A week ago I sent an appointment to Brother Stark for next Sunday, saying that I'd protract the meetin' as long as it seemed advisable. I'm sure he got the message, but you know Brother Stark. He's a precious good man but more'n likely he went a-huntin', figgerin' one day was all he needed to get ready."

Glancing humorously from Skyline to Old Kick, he continued dryly, "So, gents—if these lazy church-folks won't fix me a place to preach, reckon I'll have to ask you sinners to do it for me."

Kickapoo Joe slapped his thigh and laughed. "Oh, shore! Jest holler for the sinners when you got a critter bogged."

"Lemme see," mused Skyline aloud. "This is Thursday. That gives us two days and better. You betcha we can do it, Pahson. We'll put you up a arbor and give you a rip-snortin' send-off."

The lanky deputy got to his feet while the preacher was thanking him. "I'll mosey 'round and see can I sorta git things started. So 'long."

Before Skyline got out of hearing, Old Kick said to the parson, "Some sinners is powerful righteous."

Chapter III

"JEST FETCH ME OLD SATAN!"

ASIDE from the fact that he'd do anything he could for the man who once saved his life, Skyline Jackson had another motive for setting out to make arrangements for the camp meeting. He wanted to keep the preacher in Bandera as long as possible because of his acquaintance with Flash Harrigan and Black

Save several cents a pack! Try Avalon Cigarettes! Cellophane wrap. Union made.

Gene's outfit. The big deputy had already found out a few things from Parson Potter about this bunch, and he figured there was a lot more to be learned from the same source if he could just trick the preacher into talking.

Travis Crockett Jackson never had taken any part in preachings or camp meetings, and the way he went about getting things done might not have met with the parson's approval; but he got 'em done, regardless.

First off, he gathered all the loose boys he could lay hands on. Inside of an hour, the whole town and everybody living within two miles of it knew that Bandera was going to have a camp meeting; and of course, the country visitors would spread the news on their way home. He aroused some curiosity by making it known that the ladies shouldn't bring any meat because some of the parson's friends were going to give him a big barbecue, including turkey and a fish fry, and there was sure to be enough for everybody. Warming to his task he even went so far as to let on that there might be a little roping and riding between sermons.

At first he was a bit skeptical about this roping and riding business; but he quickly decided it would draw a whole slew of men who ordinarily wouldn't go near a preaching, so he'd just get 'em there and let the parson do the rest.

As soon as they got the news, three good citizens came to Skyline's office and volunteered their services. He told them to start building the arbor and pulpit and fixing up benches in the morning, and he'd see that they had plenty of help. When they asked where, he said he figured a mighty fine place for the pulpit would be under the trees where Gene Doak had pitched his tent.

Old Uncle Tupper combed his long whiskers with a gnarled hand, squinted up at the deputy through his shaggy brows, and allowed, "Young fella, there's where you're daid wrong. They ain't no room for ary pulpit onderneath them trees."

The loose-jointed redhead grinned. "By the time you git there with yo' pulpit, Uncle, they'll be plenty room."

After parting with the three citizens, Skyline headed for George Hay's saloon. He knew that was where he'd find some of the men he wanted to see.

On his way there, he met Bud Stanley, who owned a small ranch and a large reputation for being a first-rate cow and hog thief. In fact, Skyline had caught Bud stealing hogs one dark night; but something happened to the jury and he didn't get a conviction. He told Bud that he wanted him to provide a nice fat heifer for the barbecue, whereupon the rancher said he'd be mighty glad to do it if he had a fat heifer—but he didn't.

Skyline Jackson's hard blue eyes and thin lips could look plenty mean when he felt that way. "Then I calc'late you'd better steal a heifer, Bud," he drawled quietly. "You done stole a heap of 'em for yo' ownself, now see how slick you can steal one for the pahson."

He left Bud standing in the middle of the path, scratching his bullet head as if he found the idea hard to grasp.

BEFORE reaching the saloon, the big deputy came to where two riders were dismounting, having just arrived in town. Tommy Clump and Spec Schmidt were a pair of wild young fellows who didn't have a mean hair on 'em—yet; but they were at the point of sprouting some, because of the amount of liquor they were consuming. For quite a while, Skyline had been keeping an eye on these colts, figuring that he'd have to set about gentling 'em before they went clean to hell.

They were dusty and thirsty, but that didn't make a particle of difference to him. He told them about the camp meeting, and he told them to climb back onto their horses and burn the breeze to Kerrville—a distance of thirty miles, so as to

let folks over there know about it. Also, he said to see Doug Phelps about fetching over Old Rattler—a spoilt horse and a bad bucker whom the boys always got a lot of fun out of at riding contests.

Tommy and Spec thought a lot of Skyline, so they didn't put up much of an argument. They said they'd go as soon as they had a drink or two, and the freckled bronc rider said they'd go now; but he did tell them to ride up to the door of the saloon and he'd give 'em a pint to sorta keep 'em warm on the way.

They went.

Andy Tucker was a big, fat, lazy scamp who left most of the work on his little farm to his wife and children while he loafed around town. Skyline found him on a soap box, in the shade of the saloon, telling another fellow all about how he used to be the best hand with an axe and the fastest shingle maker on the river.

The lanky deputy grinned down at Andy, and said he was just the man Uncle Tupper needed on the camp meeting job.

"I'd shore like to make a hand, 'cause I'm strong for Pahson Potter," said Andy, "but I jest been tellin' Pete how my back give plumb out on me ten year ago this spring, so now I gotta be mighty keerful."

Skyline Jackson slowly shifted his eyes from Andy to the jail, and back again. "In this here town, ary fella that won't work disturbs the peace of them that does. These hot nights we're havin' is shore hell in our jail, and we cain't afford to feed our prisoners none to speak of. How is yo' back these days, Andy?"

The big loafer was a good-natured rascal. He grinned sheepishly. "It's gittin' better powerful fast. Fact is, I'm a-headin' for home to make my Old Lady grind my axe."

Backed up by a pleasing sense of humor, a pair of hard fists and a reputation for knowing how to use them—Skyline's high-handed methods got immediate results. Preying upon known triflers and doubtful citizens, by sundown he had arranged for hunters and fishermen to be in the woods and on the river at the crack of dawn. Others had agreed or been coerced into reporting to Uncle Tupper; and since he didn't have any idea how many men would be required, he made it a point to round up enough of them.

FIGURING that he might as well get as much done as he could before supper, Skyline ambled down the slope and across the flat to where Doak's outfit was camped. He wasn't on a hunt for trouble; but if it jumped up and slapped him in the face, he didn't aim to turn the other cheek. To his straight-forward way of thinking, there was no good reason why these toughs shouldn't contribute their share toward the camp meeting.

This was especially so, since he knew Black Gene to be Parson Potter's enemy; and with the intense loyalty of his breed, he looked upon the parson's enemy as his own—regardless.

Doak and the boys were seated near a cooking fire in front of the tent, playing the coffee pot; and Happy Jack was fussing around a dutch oven with a pothook. The hands spoke to the big deputy when he moseyed up, grinning. Black Gene's salutation wasn't much more than a grunt, and Happy Jack's greeting took a peculiar form.

He straightened up with the pothook in his left hand. Gravely he shoved his right into his shirt, pulled out a six-shooter, and tossed it to Skyline. Then he drew a butcher knife from his boot and pitched it to the ground at the deputy's feet. Afterwards, he went to puttering around the fire again.

Skyline burst out laughing, and so did the four hands. Doak went as far as to grin, but the old cook cussed the fire while trying to fix its bed of coals to suit him.

Picking up the knife, the deputy returned the weapons. "Keep 'em. You may

need 'em powerful bad befo' I git through with you."

Happy Jack hesitated a moment before taking the knife and gun. "You're puffectly welcome to the things if you want 'em, 'cause I can accumulate me some more soon's ever it gits dark."

He then told Skyline to help himself to a tincup and coffee, but if he wasn't willing to wait ten minutes for grub he could go away hungry and be damned.

The tall deputy coiled down on the grass and blew into his red-hot cup. Doak and three of the hands didn't have anything to say; but Whitey Tompkins was quite sociable, soon bringing up the subject of the camp meeting.

"Damnedest meetin' I ever heard tell of," growled Happy Jack, wiping his eyes with his flour-sack apron. "Ropin' and ridin' and preachin'. Reckon you aim for the pahson to snare old Satan and ride him plumb into the ground."

"Nope. We'll barbecue him more'n likely."

"Huh! I'd hate to have the job of barbecuin' Satan."

Skyline grinned amiably. "That's too bad, 'cause you done got it."

Happy Jack dropped the pothook and straightened up to the limit of his five-foot-three. "Go ahead and don't spare my tender feelin's."

HOLDING his coffee cup in both palms, blowing into it and sipping it, Skyline Jackson went on in his lazy voice to explain how he had told everybody that Gene Doak's outfit would take charge of the barbecuing and coffee. Of course, everything was to be furnished them so that they'd be put to no expense. He said that the whole town now knew that all meat-cooking activities were to be bossed by Happy Jack, who had the reputation of being mighty nigh the best cook in Texas.

He paused to take a swallow of coffee, and to see how they were taking it. Whitey was frankly amused and pleased. The three hands were noncommittal, but they had an eye on Doak. He was getting mad, no two ways about that. As for Happy Jack—no man could discover anything but guile on his seamed and battered face.

The big deputy concluded by saying, "When you fellas go to fixin' up yo' pit

and stuff in the mawnin', jest holler for anything you need and I'll see that you git it pronto."

"Where in hell did you git the right to boss us around thisaway?" growled Black Gene.

"Ain't bossin' none," drawled Skyline. "I'm jest tellin' you what folks is a-bankin' on."

The big man got up. His black beard seemed to bristle, and Skyline couldn't help grinning when he thought of what would happen if a fella got a handful and shook it good and hard.

Doak spoke his piece about what he thought of the town and its citizens, emphasizing his remarks with vulgarity and profanity; and pretty soon he got right personal. The lantern-jawed redhead kept on grinning until this happened, then his face suddenly became so hard and vicious as to make him look like an entirely different man. He didn't get to his feet. He just sat there, looking up at Black Gene over the edge of his tincup.

"But damn yo' soul!" the bully concluded. "You won't go heeled, so my hands is tied."

Skyline's voice was low and his words came no faster than usual; but the warm, friendly drawl was missing. Somehow his tone and bearing bespoke the last limit of self-confidence.

"The reason I ain't packin' my six-shooters," he said, "is because I don't want to kill you, and I don't aim to buckle 'em on until you make me do it. Now, listen close. I don't give a damn whether you turn a hand or not. That's up to you and the boys. But this here outfit is goin' to do what I said it'd do, unless it gits to hell and gone away from Bandera befo' sunup —clean out'n the county."

The tall deputy arose slowly. He tossed his cup into a dishpan, and told the cook, "Much obliged for the coffee and the invite, but my grub is paid for up to the hotel so I reckon I'd better go eat it."

In the act of turning away, he paused. "I purty nigh forgot to tell you that the folks allus build a arbor right here. The pulpit goes in where yo' tent is, so I calc'late you better move camp befo' they go to work in the mawnin'—'bout seven, I eemagine."

There didn't seem to be anything left for Black Gene to say. He dare not openly shoot an unarmed man in that community, and apparently his experience with Skyline's fist was due to have a lasting effect.

The loose-jointed bronc peeler couldn't see what was going on behind him while he ambled away, but Happy Jack's bellow overtook him before he had gone three rods.

"Hey, you pizen longhawn!" roared the cook. "Jest fetch me Old Satan, gutted or on the hoof, and I'll barbecue a side of his ribs—so help me!"

NEITHER Flash Harrigan nor Gene Doak showed up around town that night, but Happy Jack and the hands entertained a fair-sized crowd in George Hay's place until close to midnight. Skyline left them strictly alone. Sitting in his little office with the door and windows open but no light, he could hear nearly everything that went on and he could think.

No two ways about it—Parson Potter just as good as said that he saw Gene Doak's outfit shoving some stolen horses toward the border; and he practically branded Flash Harrigan a horse thief, or a leader of thieves. Also, he wasn't talking through his hat when he said what he did about thieves using Bandera County as a stop-over on their way south. It all fitted in right nicely with Flash's attempt to buy the Kroska ranch which was ideally situated for that purpose, away up the river in some mighty wild country. Gazing through the night to the northward, Skyline found it easy to imagine a band of stolen stuff sliding through the pass into the valley—a gigantic bowl, then bearing to the right and making its way over mountain trails to the Kroska place without anyone catching on. Once in there, the stuff could be close-herded out of sight on good grass and plenty water until it was in shape to make another dash across the country.

He wasn't quite sure how Black Gene would come into the picture, but it wouldn't surprise him to see Flash pretend to hire this bunch of tough hands if he bought the ranch. Maybe it was all imagination, but Skyline had an idea that Harrigan's reason for getting out of town so quickly after the boys rolled in was because he knew them and feared they'd let the cat out of the bag, being drunk.

But all this was more or less guess work, he reflected, and he didn't have a thing on these fellows. However, he was fixing to keep Parson Potter in town for a while and it'd be his own fault if he wasn't slick enough to make the preacher talk.

Long before sunup the following morning, Skyline Jackson rolled over in bed to where he could see out across the flat through a window of his upstairs room in the hotel. The triangle formed by the three oaks was vacant. A hundred yards south of there, Happy Jack was fanning a fire in front of the tent.

T. C. Jackson sighed and settled back on his pillow. He blissfully closed his eyes, and said to himself that he could lay there

all day if that frisky little finch would just keep on a-singin' in the big old liveoak outside his window.

Before he finished breakfast, Skyline heard voices, laughter, and the chuck-chuck of axes down on the river. From the hotel verandah later, he saw Uncle Tupper and a gang of men at work on the arbor; and he saw Whitey and Happy Jack making the dirt fly from the barbecue pit a short distance away. Evidently Black Gene and the other hands had left the job to them.

Having started things to moving, he didn't go near the flat all day. He figured they didn't need him; and besides, he had important business to attend to.

SKYLINE had been to the Kroska ranch, traveling the main trail to get there, and it now occurred to him that it would be a pious idea to investigate other possible approaches to the place. So he lit out on Cloudburst, his big roan horse, and they covered a lot of territory before returning to town late that evening. When he sat down to supper and heard Harrigan announce that he was now a citizen of Bandera County, having bought the ranch, the big deputy knew more than one trail that led to Flash's door.

Long before noon on Saturday, folks commenced to roll into town for the camp meeting. These early arrivals came long distances, allowing themselves plenty of time because of the uncertainties attending travel in that country. Those who didn't stop with friends, went into camp on the flat and it quickly took on the appearance of a picnic ground: covered wagons, ambulances, spring wagons, buggies, work horses, saddle horses, mules, men, women, dogs, and into and out of—over and under everything, children.

In the center of this gathering stood the arbor—a frame-work of poles extending from the triangle of trees toward the Medina, with open sides and a roof of leafy brush, and a floor of mesquite grass, thick, curly, soft enough to sleep on. Beneath the arbor were rows of benches—cypress boards borrowed from the sawmill and supported by wooden blocks. The fact that these benches had no backs against which to rest during a two-hour sermon, wasn't a hardship in the estimation of men and women to whom the sermon meant so much. And besides, many of the old and feeble would bring their rocking chairs.

A small platform not over two feet in height, served as a pulpit. Upon it stood three cowhide-bottom chairs, and some woman's prized center table—solid walnut with carved legs, resting upon large glass balls gripped in the claws of an eagle.

Immediately in front of the pulpit, a long bench—the mourners' bench.

A short distance to the right of the arbor, there stood a long U-shaped table—boards supported by sawhorses. Twenty feet away, between the table and the river, Happy Jack and Whitey presided over the barbecue pit and cooking fire.

Up the Medina a quarter mile or so where the flat widened out, an old pole corral had been repaired to accommodate calves for the roping contest. Figuring that steer roping might prove to be a bit rough for camp meeting entertainment, Skyline suggested that long yearlings ought to be about right.

By sundown Saturday, the hunters and fishermen had commenced to produce; Bud Stanley had delivered a nice, fat heifer—*dressed*—so nobody ever found out what brand the hide bore, and Kickapoo Joe North had promised to supply all the beef required for the balance of the meeting regardless of how long it might continue.

With all that beef, deer, turkey, fish, and pork to be cooked and many a healthy appetite to consume it, Happy Jack squalled for help and got it. In fact, the barbecue pit became one of the most popular spots on the grounds for both men and women. Ugly as sin and steeped in it, nevertheless the old cook had a way with

the ladies—wit, gallantry, flattery, and a degree of skill which they had to admire.

Recalling what Parson Potter said about Happy's inability to cook when sober, Skyline called Whitey aside and gave him a jug of good whiskey with instructions to dish it out to the cook in quantities sufficient to keep him half tight, but no more. Thereafter, Skyline sort of kept an eye on Whitey.

EVERYBODY was happy; and everybody prophesied that, with Parson Potter to preach, Happy Jack to cook, calves to rope, and broncs to ride, this would prove to be the grandest camp meeting ever held in West Texas.

But early Saturday night, the big deputy heard that which he had half expected and hoped he wouldn't hear—rumors of impending trouble. Nobody knew where it started, but everybody knew that somebody had said Parson Potter was in for it.

Skyline Jackson went to his office, buckled on his guns, and tied his holsters down. Afterwards, he walked slowly around town until he found the man he wanted in an old log house some distance from the main street—a dive where riffraff met to gamble and drink bad liquor. Looking through a window, he saw Black Gene leaning on the bar while holding forth to his three men and several local toughs who craved to be tougher, but lacked the nerve.

The tall deputy ambled through the door, then lounged carelessly aside until he had the wall at his back. Someone hissed a word of caution. Black Gene stopped in the middle of a sentence. He turned quickly to face Skyline. His eyes opened wider than normal, and as suddenly narrowed. He hooked his elbows on the bar and leaned against it.

Skyline Jackson was very matter of fact, like a man performing a routine task. "Don't let me interfere with yo' fun, fellas," he drawled, looking straight at Doak. "I jest dropped in to sorta remind you that Parson Potter starts his roundup in the mawnin', and he keeps on a-combin' the hills for sinners until he gits damned good and ready to send his wagon home. Reckon that's 'bout all I got on my chest. So 'long, boys."

No one said a word—no one made a move.

He grinned and backed through the door.

At five minutes to nine o'clock Sunday morning, every foot of space beneath the arbor was filled with men and women—old and young, and children of all ages. Outside the benches and in the aisles, well to the front because many of them were hard of hearing—very old men and women were seated in chairs brought from home. Upon either side and at the rear of the arbor, braving a July sun while suffering the tortures of Sunday clothing, were men who wouldn't stand there in tight boots to listen to any preacher other than Parson Potter.

At nine o'clock he walked down the center aisle. His black head was bare, for he hung his hat on a limb outside. On his left arm, he carried a cartridge belt and holstered six-shooter. In his right hand, he carried a Winchester. When he stepped onto the pulpit it could be seen that his boots were freshly blackened, the peculiar gloss of stove-lid polish. He hung the gunbelt on the back of a chair, placed the rifle across the table at right angles to the congregation, and laid a small Bible near it.

For the space of thirty seconds he stood there in silence, looking out upon the upturned faces before him. His shoulders straightened, the loose coat fitted more snugly over them. His strange eyes had that peculiarly cold brilliance, and there was no vestige of smile on his face to soften it. He looked every inch The Fighting Parson.

Deep, resonant, with the power of the man behind it, his voice carried. "I've been given to understand that most of you want preaching, but there are some who want

a fight. I'm here to accommodate all of you. First, we shall have the preaching."

Chapter IV

How to Make a Preacher Talk

THOSE who wanted a preaching, got it; but those who wanted a fight, failed to speak up at the conclusion of the sermon. From nine until ten-thirty, and from two-thirty until four or four-thirty every day for three days, Parson Potter preached to congregations that overflowed his arbor; and he gave them the kind of preaching they liked best—fiery, eloquent, sincere.

This peaceful state of affairs came as a surprise to nearly everybody, for they had heard the talk that went around and expected trouble. More than one religious man sat through a sermon with a six-shooter inside his shirt. By the end of the third day, they were wondering what caused the sudden and apparently permanent death of the disturbing rumors.

When questioned, Skyline Jackson was as much at sea as anyone else.

After the morning sermon, the parson and most of his congregation were on hand for the roping and riding. Often he acted as one of the contest judges, and no man had a wittier tongue when it came to poking fun at the boys who let a bronc pile 'em or lost their calves. This didn't do him any harm with the older folks; and in the estimation of the wild young scamps who did most of the riding and roping, the parson's stock went up by leaps and bounds.

Having no one to help him, Parson Potter preached but twice a day. However, the good folks kept him busy at night with prayer meetings, singing bees, and experience meetings. Intending to ride out to the Dead Indian with Jessie and Old Kick on Tuesday night after he got through, he rode Cactus down to the arbor that evening and picketed him to an elm not far away where he could graze. Skyline was there when the meeting broke up, so he went with the preacher to get his horse.

Cactus was gone!

Parson Potter looked at the tree in silence. He took a short turn about it, studying the ground in the light of a full moon. He came back and stopped facing Skyline.

"They've stolen my horse," was all he said.

"Figgerin' to start trouble, I betcha."

"Well, they've started it," said the preacher. "Where can I borrow a pony?"

"Come up to my office," suggested Skyline, "and I'll git you one. But you better let *me* prize Old Cactus loose from them thieves."

"Much obliged, but I never let the law kill my snakes." As they walked toward the arbor, he added, "Let's keep this quiet. I don't want anybody but Jessie and her father to know about it."

Soon after they reached the deputy's office, he went to the livery stable and hired a saddle horse.

Upon his return, he found the parson buckling on his gunbelt while arguing with Old Kick.

"I'm a-tellin' you straight," growled the sheriff, "a pahson ain't got no right to go skytootin' off alone after thieves. 'Tain't good religion."

Parson Potter twirled the cylinder of his Colt. "Huh! What d'you know about religion?"

"Nothin' much, but I know a heap about hoss thieves," barked the old-timer. "You're jest a-fixin' to stop lead."

The parson dropped his gun into its hol-

ster. "Maybeso, but it don't hurt much when you get used to it."

He picked up his rifle and went to the door. "I'll be seeing you-all at mornin' services, if you've got the grace to come. Good night."

WHEN he heard the parson ride away, Skyline glanced at Jessie. He found her large eyes upon him, and he saw signs of disapproval in them. Couldn't much blame her. She thought a heap of the parson, and she knew mighty well that he couldn't afford to lose his horse.

He tried to grin and had an idea that he didn't do a very good job of it. "It's gittin' powerful late, so why don't you stay the balance of the night with the Montagues or put up at the hotel?"

Before she had a chance to answer, Old Kick growled, "No she don't! The Montagues has got a house full of company and we're too pore to buy beds. I'm a-takin' Jessie home."

"Then you'll have to ramble some," drawled Skyline, "'cause you're a-ridin' with me in jest about two minutes."

"What's that?"

"Yes sah, and what I mean—we gotta ride."

Jessie's quick smile of approval set Skyline's heart to pitching.

She exclaimed, "I might've known it! Of course you're going to trail the parson and help him if he needs it."

"Cain't rightly say that we're a-fixin' to trail him," drawled the lanky deputy, "but when he gits to where he's goin', we'll be there."

"Jest a-showin' off," grunted the old sheriff. "If yuh know so much, where's the pahson a-headin' for?"

"The Kroska place."

Kickapoo Joe caught his breath like a man who suddenly remembered something important. He raised his shaggy white brows and thoughtfully rolled his eyes at the ceiling.

"Mmmm-huh," he mused. Without warning, he turned to Jessie and growled, "Well—why don't you git along over to the ho-tel? Cain't you see that me and Skyline has gotta ride? We could've been halfway there by now, if it hadn't been for you."

The girl went to her father, placed her hands on his shoulders and kissed him. She lifted her eyes to Skyline's. Their glances met and clung for a long moment.

Jessie turned away, remarking quietly, "So 'long, boys. Take good care of yourselves."

Skyline Jackson and Kickapoo Joe North did some riding. The old man was mounted upon a rangy black that came pretty close to keeping pace with Cloudbust, and as far as the riders themselves were concerned—Old Kick knew as much as the younger man about how to make it easy on his horse while traveling fast through rough country.

They hadn't gone far before he demanded, "You wild hyeeny, why in hell don't you stick to the trail?"

Skyline dropped to Cloudbust's shoulder in the nick of time to dodge a low-hanging cedar. Straightening up, he said, "The pahson took the trail 'cause he wouldn't know any other way to git there. We're takin' a short cut."

"Betcha it won't do us no good. With the head start he had and as mad as he was, he's shore to git there first."

The lanky deputy chuckled. "No danger of that. I made sartin to hire him a nice, gentle, wind-broke hoss."

OLD KICK laughed so hard he nearly forgot to duck a Spanish oak which his horse shot under without regard to the man on its back. He had to stop and go cussing back after his hat.

Skyline waited for him. In that bright moonlight, the old-timer couldn't help seeing his young deputy's wide grin when he returned with the hat.

"I do declare it beats me," drawled the red-headed bronc rider, "how ary fella can

live in this country as long as you have and still be a tenderfoot that cain't ride the bresh."

Pure slander, which made the tough old sheriff so mad he stayed right on top of Cloudbust's heels until they arrived at the Kroska clearing. Afterwards he did admit that he'd never forget that ride, swearing that when he piled out of the saddle, he didn't have a whole patch of hide six inches square from the tops of his boots to the top of his head.

They tied their horses in good cover, hung their spurs and chaps on their saddlehorns, and walked the remaining two hundred yards to a woodshed situated about thirty feet north of the kitchen door. Having visited the Kroskas in times past, both men knew the layout. A T-shaped rock house—its wings served as a combined kitchen and dining room, while along its front extended a large living room and two bedrooms. Small windows opened through the eighteen-inch walls, there was one door in the kitchen and one in the front of the house. The living room was brightly lighted, the night was hot and everything was wide open.

Although they couldn't make out much of what was said, they could hear Flash Harrigan and Black Gene Doak laughing and talking, other voices occasionally joining in. Skyline heaved a sigh. Parson Potter hadn't arrived.

They had to wait for quite a while. Watching through a crack between the logs of which the woodshed was built, Skyline at length saw the parson jogging down the trail.

He whispered to the sheriff, "Yander he comes, slow and easy."

Old Kick peered through the crack. "Easy is right," he chuckled. "He ain't the kind of a jasper that'd kill a windbroke hoss."

Parson Potter halted outside the yard gate. He tied his horse there and walked to the front door, evidently making no effort to conceal his movements.

Depending upon the preacher's sudden arrival to hold the interest of Flash and his men, the officers made a dash for the house. They crouched under a front window in time to hear the parson say:

"Harrigan, I came to get my horse."

"Your hoss!" exclaimed Flash. "Why pahson, we ain't got your hoss."

Potter didn't raise his voice. "I won't call you a liar, Harrigan, because I don't think you personally stole my horse. Gene Doak is the man who did it."

Black Gene ripped out an oath. He swore he never touched the horse.

Flash Harrigan's smooth voice again reached the listeners beneath the window. "I wouldn't put it past Gene to steal a good hoss, pahson, but I know daggoned well he'd have too much sense to lift your'n when we're just gettin' fixed to settle down in this country."

"That sounds reasonable, all right," returned the preacher coldly, "but I happen to know that he hasn't got sense enough to keep him from tryin' to get square with me for the lickin' I gave him over at Boerne when he got drunk and shot up the town."

A CHAIR scraped on the floor as a chair sometimes does when a man gets to his feet hurriedly. Black Gene rumbled, "I didn't steal yo' damned hoss, and that settles it far as I'm consarned. And if you're a-huntin' trouble, you shore come to the right place to git it."

Skyline's muscles bunched, then he decided to listen a moment longer. Although he couldn't see them, the big deputy easily imagined Potter's terribly cold and penetrating eyes drilling holes in that bunch of thieves—one after the other. In his day, he had seen The Fightin' Parson mad.

The preacher's words continued to fall evenly, calmly, and they carried a world of conviction. "You know I never hunt trouble," he declared, "and likewise, you know I never call in the law to help me handle any job that's rightly my own. But it's beginning to look like I'm going to

have to break that rule. Shut up, Harrigan! I know you fellas are a gang of thieves. I know you're figurin' on making this place a stop-over when runnin' stolen stuff from the north through to the border."

Flash Harrigan's voice rose in an emphatic denial, but the parson cut him short.

"Listen to me! You may be fixin' to settle down here, but if I turn Skyline Jackson loose on you, you'll be buried here."

Black Gene broke in with a vulgar oath.

"You pore simpleton!" snapped the preacher. "You think you're bad. That ganglin' boy can give you a head start and shoot your ornery hide so full of holes it won't hold shingles. I knew him in the Devil's River country, and I've seen his guns a-smokin'."

Loaded with concern too genuine to be mistaken for anything else, Harrigan's voice lost all its smoothness. "I'll do anything to keep out of trouble in this country, Pahson. We haven't got your hoss, but I'll pay you whatever you say it's wuth right now."

Skyline didn't hear the parson's answer, for he was on his way to the front door. Old Kick tromped on his heels and was right behind him when he stopped on the stone step, squarely in the light where everyone in the room could see him.

"Steady, boys! We got you corralled!"

The lie served its purpose. It kept the thieves from going for their guns on the spur of the moment.

With a single quick glance, the red-headed deputy took stock of things. A yard to his left, stood Parson Potter. Flash and the three hands sat facing him in chairs against the opposite wall. Six feet to his right in the middle of the room, towered Black Gene Doak.

Skyline Jackson didn't lay a hand on his six-shooters. He remained standing on the step for the space of five seconds, then he went into the room. Kickapoo Joe North filled the door behind him, his right hand gripping a Colt, a dangerous light in his clear old eyes.

"Much obliged, pahson," drawled the lanky deputy. "You didn't noways aim to do it, but you done told us all we need to know."

He looked straight at Harrigan. The beginnings of a grin tugged at his thin lips. It appeared to him that the big dandy's ruddy face was changing color mighty fast, in spots. From the side of his eye he saw Gene Doak sort of shrivel up a little. It was plain to see that the three hands wished to hell they were some place a long ways off.

SPEAKING in a conversational voice, Skyline told Harrigan, "I calc'late you know it's yo' move, so they ain't nothin' much for us to say. If it takes you mebbe three fo' days to git some of yo' money back from Mistah Kroska, I reckon that'll be all right."

"Shore," growled Old Kick. "Meantime, we'll be gittin' set to do some hangin' jest in case they's a slip-up."

"Course you understand," continued the big deputy, "if the pahson ain't got his hoss by tomorrer noon, sartin folks is shore to hold it agin you."

Without turning his head, he spoke to Parson Potter and the sheriff, "Git goin', fellas. I'll kivver yo' backs."

While hurrying to where their horses were tied, Skyline made a mental note to tell Happy Jack and Whitey that Bandera would be mighty glad to have them stay as long as they wanted to.

On the way back to town, Kickapoo Joe North laughed nearly every time he looked at the preacher's wind-broke horse. A famous practical joker himself, Parson Potter took it good-naturedly; but he didn't show his usual high appreciation of a joke, for the reason that the loss of a horse meant a great deal to a man in his circumstances.

"Stop botherin' yo' head about Old Cactus," said Skyline upon one occasion,

"'cause I got a extry hoss you can have as long as you want the cuss. He's a sorry old crowbait, but I reckon he can carry you if you don't put on too much fat."

Arriving in town, Old Kick and the parson remained at the jail while Skyline returned the livery stable horse and brought the other one back.

He stopped it directly in front of the office, in bright light from the open door and window. The horse wore a fine, plaited bridle, and on its back was a brand, spanking new saddle. Behind the cantle were a pair of magnificent saddle pockets, beautifully carved, their flaps stamped with the initials "A J P."

The parson came to the door with the sheriff close behind him. He stopped suddenly. He stared like a man who figured his eyes were doing him dirt.

"Why—uh—that's Cactus!"

"Do tell!" exclaimed Skyline with a perfectly straight face.

Old Kick shoved the preacher ahead, out of the way. He took one squint at the horse, dropped his hand to his gun, and glared at the solemn redhead.

Skyline gravely winked at the sheriff, and told the parson, "It shore is tough when a deppity has to steal a hoss to make a preacher talk."

Andrew Jackson Potter placed his hands on the young man's shoulders and gave him a good shaking. "As Kickapoo Joe was sayin', some sinners is powerful righteous."

News event!

There will be another Skyline Jackson story

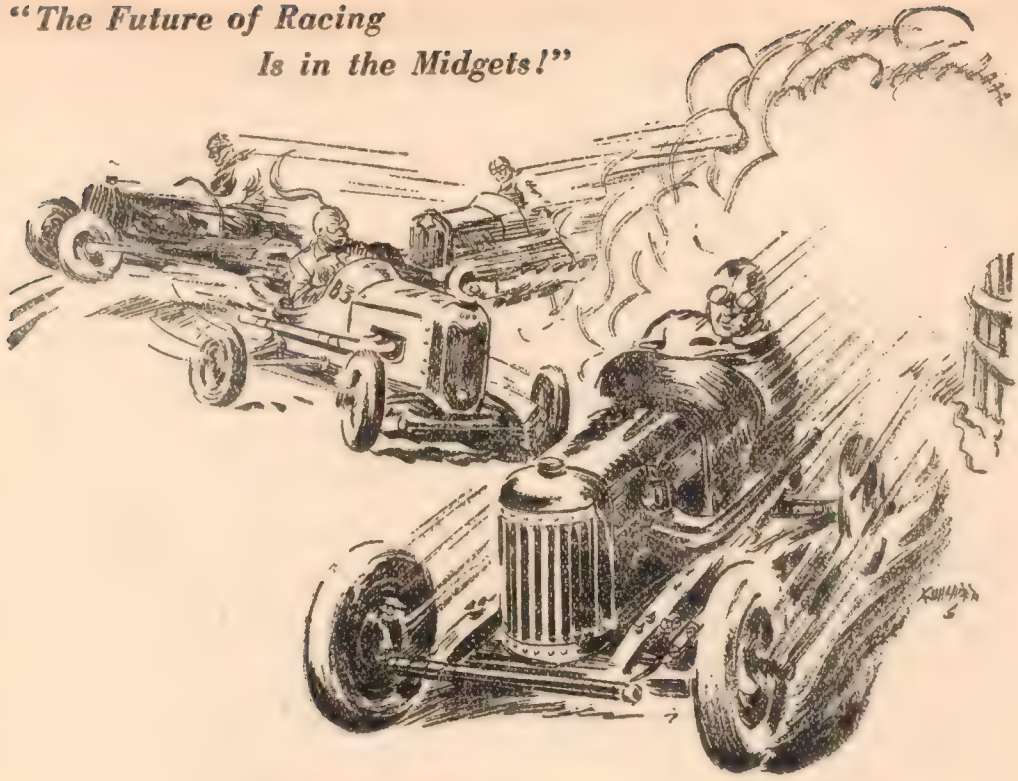
by CADDO CAMERON

in an early issue—

"Two Guns and No Brains"

25

"The Future of Racing Is in the Midgets!"



NIGHT CIRCUIT

By HOWARD NOSTRAND

Author of "To the Swift," "Detoured Hitch Hike," etc.

"WILD" JOE BENNETT waved the ambulance back into the infield of the Center City Stadium. He didn't need medical attention. A few bruises—they didn't matter.

But his midget automobile racer, Number Twenty-Two, was a wreck. It scraped through the cinders behind the tow-car like a mashed toy.

Joe limped after it into the pits.

From his crash helmet to his shoes he was clothed in black. Oil and dust had smeared his face until it, too, was black. He removed his goggles, and the clean skin beneath was like a white mask.

A shorter figure in blue coveralls, his brother Pete, fell into step beside him. Pete was seventeen years old and a senior at Center City High. This night, with the help of a couple of neighborhood lads, he was Joe's pit man.

"Danny Burke hooked you, didn't he?" Pete scuffled along as if he were kicking a ball—or somebody's face.

Joe slipped off his crash helmet and wiped it on his sleeve.

"Well," he admitted, "Burke did some nudging."

"Yes." Pete glanced at the midget which the wrecking crew was shoving into its stall. "*Some* nudging!"

"It's all part of the racket, kid." Joe laid a hand on his brother's shoulder.

Pete twisted away. "This is your first

time in the doodlebugs. You've been pushing big cars at state fairs. Don't try to tell me about this racket. I've been here for every race. Ask me something!"

Joe smiled. "You're covering a lot of territory, Pete."

"Ask me something," Pete repeated. "Ask me the size of the cop's shoe, for instance. I learned that at the first meet three years ago. We kids tried to dig our way in under the fence. Right this minute I'd be driving a bug myself, if it wasn't for ma."

"Ma—and the Racing Commission," Joe corrected. "Stick to the mechanical end, kid. One lunatic in a family is enough."

"Burke hooked you," Pete insisted. "Otherwise you could have straightened out."

Joe shook his head. "It was the right rear tire blowing which caused that loop."

"Go look at the tire and you'll see why it blew. The side-wall is cut."

Out on the track under the floodlights the Final racketed on. A high-pitched whine cut through the roar of motorcycle engines and converted outboard motors. Danny Burke's car, Number Six, was singing its song of triumph.

Number Six was no home-made rattletrap with a makeshift motor. It was custom-built. A four-cylinder Offenhauser purred smoothly under its glittering, green-and-chromium hood. Danny Burke was a Triple-A man from Milwaukee.

"And next time you get the chance—" Pete had to shout because of the noise, "take a look at the front end of Number Six! I've looked that car over a hundred times. I didn't notice until tonight that it had sharp points on the front springs."

"Points? What kind of points?"

"They looked like detachable gadgets for greasing the shackles. I just happened to notice them when we were lining up for this race. I'll bet Burke slipped them on after the semi-final. He's afraid of you."

Joe flicked a hand at the idea. "Forget it. Danny Burke wouldn't risk his reputation. With his experience and that thirty-five-hundred-dollar racer, he doesn't have to be afraid of anything."

"Experience!" Pete sniffed scornfully. "You win two events, and a little while later his front end grows teeth!"

Joe grinned. "What has Danny Burke ever done to you?"

"Look at the tire!"

"I know." Joe spoke mildly. "I'll talk to him when he pulls into the pits."

"You'll *talk?*" Pete was incredulous.

Joe raised his eyebrows. "What would you do?"

"I'd do some hooking on my own account—left and right hooks to his jaw!"

Joe laughed. "Go hook the trailer to the Chevvy. I want to load up and roll before the fans pile in."

A young woman had been standing off to one side. When Pete trotted out to the parking lot she came over to Joe and asked, "Are you Mr. Bennett?"

He didn't answer right away. The midgets were nearing the finish line. The starter was waiting with the checkered flag. The crowd was yelling. The announcer—with the aid of a cluster of loudspeaker horns—was going them one better.

"You *are* Joe Bennett," she insisted. "Aren't you?"

She must have thought that he hadn't heard her the first time.

"Yes—after I'm cleaned up," he said.

It was dark in the pits. But she was standing where a beam from one of the track floods filtered through the stand. Joe got a good look at her—black hair, smooth cheeks, large eyes.

"I saw you win the feature at the Clayton County Fair last month." She seemed to be trying to imagine what his face would be like without the dirt.

JOE was watching his Chevvy roadster pull in with Pete at the wheel. "I didn't see you. Funny—only seven thousand people were there."

"Well, Mr. Bennett—" The friendliness

was gone from her voice. "It has been nice meeting you." Abruptly she left him and walked toward the track entrance."

The steaming doodles were coming out. Those with clutches moved under their own power. The others were shoved by their crews.

They had to worm through the mob that was commencing the usual pop-eyed inspection tour.

"There's Joe Bennett. I thought he was killed until he crawled out from under Twenty-two. It was upside down in the air when the cameraman snapped it. I saw the flash. I guess the picture will be in the morning papers——"

The announcer's voice boomed from the amplifiers, "Official time, ladies and gentlemen!" It sounded like a foghorn talking. "Seven minutes, thirty-three and two-fifth seconds. Winner! Danny Burke in the Offenhauser, Number Six."

The girl was wearing a green hat, a little thing over one ear.

It was still in sight. When Joe craned his neck to watch where it went, Pete tapped his shoulder.

"I thought you were in a hurry."

"Hurry?" Joe asked vaguely. He turned around. "Oh—sure. Are you ready?"

"You'll have to help us lift the doodle into the trailer," said Pete. "The rear is jammed and it won't roll."

With a couple of fans helping, the midget was loaded on and tied down. Pete drove out past the ticket booths and the big sign: "NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR INJURIES FROM FLYING AUTOMOBILE PARTS OR CINDERS."

Burke's truck, green-and-chromium like the racer, was across the street in front of the Stadium Diner.

Joe said, "We'll have an outfit like that some day. Only it will be painted red, with 'Bennett Brothers Racing Team' on the sides."

The Chevvy gathered speed and the trailer began to whip. One of Pete's helpers was riding on the running-board. He was shouting encouragement to the other one, who was sitting in the midget.

Pete said, 'Gee, Joe——"

"What?" Joe had caught a glimpse of green in a car that was passing. He bent forward hastily, breathed on the windshield, and wiped off the fog with his handkerchief.

"Well, I mean——" Pete knew what he wanted to say, but the words were hard to get out. "Well, why did you drag her into the argument?"

The other car angled off on Division Street, and Joe faced his brother. "Drag —say, what are you talking about?"

"I saw you talking to her. And I saw that she didn't like what you said. Why didn't you go right to Danny?"

"I forgot about Danny," said Joe. "What has he got to do with this girl?"

"Don't you know who she is?" Pete hooked one arm over the back of the seat and grinned. "That's Mil' Graham. Her father owns Center City Motors. Do you remember the girl who used to scoot around town on a motor-driven buckboard?"

"Yes," said Joe. "I—" his eyes bulged. "Watch the road!"

They were on a curve. Pete was steering straight for a field. Twisting the wheel sharply, he went on as if there had been no interruption, "Well, that was Mil'. And did I envy her that buckboard!"

A smile played on Joe's lips. "So that was what you were trying to make when you swiped the kicker out of ma's washing machine!"

The youth on the running-board ducked

his head in under the top and complained, "I almost didn't stay on just now. Take it a little easier, Pete."

"It's against the law to ride out there," said Pete virtuously.

HE WENT on talking to Joe. "Since the midgets started here in Center, Mil' has never missed a night. She knows all the drivers and officials—everybody. And Danny Burke is only the driver of Number Six. Her father's shop foreman is the owner."

"Oh," said Joe.

"So you can understand," Pete concluded, "why I thought you were arguing with her."

The Chevvy slowed. A billboard ahead proclaimed, "THESE DESIRABLE CITY LOTS—CHEAP!"

A tar road skirted this lie and cut across barren acres to Bennett's Poultry Farm. The pit crew dropped off.

Pete chuckled. "Mil' was sore at you all right."

"I guess she was," Joe admitted.

He squirmed a little. Perhaps he was merely trying to find a more comfortable place for his shoulders.

"What did you say to her?" Pete asked.

"Nothing. She came over and asked me if I was Joe Bennett, and——"

"*She* came over to *you?*" Pete was so astonished that he let up on the gas.

"She gaped at me. You know the way fans do—like you're something in a zoo." Joe shrugged. "I should be used to it by this time. But I was already feeling annoyed—" His voice died away. He stared ahead at a farmhouse which the headlights had discovered.

"So what did you say?" Pete smiled expectantly.

"I've been trying to remember," Joe said. "But I can't."

The next morning Pete was working on the midget in the barn before six o'clock. He unbolted the body and dismantled the front end.

He was tearing down the differential when Mrs. Bennett came out.

"I've been calling you for I don't know how long," she said. "In ten minutes the school bus will come by. Here you are with grease from head to foot. You march upstairs and clean up."

He paused on the second floor landing. A form was lumped under a patchwork of quilt in the back bedroom.

"Hey, Joe! Yank off the things that have to go to the welder's. I'll take them to town as soon as I get home from school."

AT FOUR o'clock he burst breathlessly into the barn. Joe was straightening a kink in the frame of the racer with a railroad sledge. The operation ended with one last ear-splitting clang.

Pete said loftily, "If you listened to me once in a while, you wouldn't have to work so hard. I told you I'd have it done in town. A torch would have ironed it out like tinfoil. This way I bet you started the rivets."

Joe was pawing among the parts that littered the floor. "I want to work on it tonight. If you took it to town I'd be held up until tomorrow. And I didn't start the rivets. Take a look."

Pete stood over him. "How much cash have you?"

"About a hundred-fifty dollars. Why?"

"Do you suppose pa would lend us some?"

"That depends——" Joe was thinking of something else. He had picked up the carburetor and was clicking the feed lever back and forth. "Why should we borrow any money?"

Pete leaned against the bench, remembered his good clothes, and stepped away.

"Well, I was heading for the bus. When I passed Graham's showroom—"

"Showroom?" Joe set down the carburetor and eyed him. "Center City Motors?"

"Yes. So I was—"

"That's on Division Street. Kind of a detour, if you were heading for the bus."

"What of it?" Pete was suddenly belligerent.

"Nothing. Go ahead."

"Like I said, I was passing when Mil' Graham called out for me to drop in on my way back."

"On your way back?" Joe grinned.

Pete paused for a moment. Then, "Are you going to let me tell it or not?"

"Sure," said Joe. "But I couldn't understand why you were over that way."

"I was seeing a girl home. I practically told you. Want a map of the route?"

"No," said Joe. "And so you dropped in on your way back. What then?"

"I went in and we talked about racing. She says that quite a few Eastern drivers have put English motorcycle engines in their midgets. She says they're cleaning up."

"Those are J.A.P.'s," Joe said. "Built especially for speed work. I saw one last Saturday at the Benton Hill-Climb."

"Well," said Pete, "they cost over six hundred dollars. But Mil' says she can get us a twenty percent discount through her—"

"Maybe," said Joe, "she gets a commission. Forget it. The old Harley wasn't doing so bad before the tire blew."

"Mil' is all right," Pete said defensively. "And she knows your record better than I do."

"Forget it. I have work to do." Joe became playfully sarcastic. "You're wasting my time—you and your girl-friends."

HE HAD an idea about double carburetion that called for special manifolds.

He didn't want to tell Pete, because it would start an argument. Anything that didn't originate with Pete, started an argument—Pete was seventeen years old and a senior in high school.

"Start assembling," Joe said. "I'm going to see about something for a little while."

The machine works in Center City was closed for the night. The owner, who lived nearby, promised to do the job the first thing in the morning.

Joe was on his way home when a traffic light held him up. A coupe had stopped at the curb on the opposite corner. A girl wearing a green hat climbed out and entered Dale's Pharmacy.

It was Mil' Graham. Joe pulled across Main Street and parked the Chevvy.

She was at the soda fountain. Although he sat down next to her, she didn't glance in his direction. Then he saw her eyes staring at him from the mirror back of the counter.

She smiled. "Now we're even."

Mil' was at his side, but Joe spoke to the reflection. "Even—even what?"

"Last night I was one of seven thousand."

The soda-jerker's white coat obscured the image in the mirror. Joe had to look directly at Mil'.

"I guess I was feeling sorry for myself," he confessed.

Her eyes sparkled. "Your brother was telling me how busy you are. Don't tell me that you came in here to apologize."

"Well, I—" Joe grinned broadly. "Why, sure. I was so bothered that my hands shook. I couldn't hold a wrench."

"All right," she said. "Let's call that an apology. Now what about tomorrow? Are you going to beat Burke?"

He shrugged.

"Somebody should," Mil' went on. "Somebody should beat him if it's no more than just once. He needs to be beaten. And I don't mean when he's having motor trouble. I mean ride him right off the track."

"So you're appointing me?"

"I've watched you win big car races—"

"Well," Joe drawled, "I been to a few. Seems like I heard that Number Six is owned locally."

"Danny Burke has been very active—locally." She dropped her eyes to the spoon in her hand.

"Oh!" Joe said. "It's like that!"

Mil' shook her head. "No, it's not like that. It isn't important; it never *was* important."

"Well, I'll do what I can anyhow." Joe watched her closely. "I wonder what the purse will be at Temple Speedway?"

Mil' frowned. "It has always been between eight and nine hundred dollars, but what—"

"First place ought to be worth about three hundred," Joe said.

She was increasingly puzzled. "Why—yes."

"Fine. I'll have enough to see a movie on if I win. And Saturday is my day off. Only I don't like to go alone and I don't know anybody to take."

Mil' smiled a very small smile—as if she were using her cheek muscles to keep it from spreading. "There's a match meet in Waukette on Saturday that I've been wanting to see."

Joe was admiring a dimple that had appeared. He wondered why he hadn't noticed it before. "What if I lose?"

The dimple deepened. "Couldn't we still go to the movies?"

IT WAS late when he brought the roadster to a stop alongside the barn, but a light was shining through the cracks. He went in to see what was happening and he could hardly believe his eyes. Twenty-two was ready to go!

A smudged face popped up from the other side of the midget. Pete had been asleep on the floor. He yawned, stretched, and said, "I thought you were coming back in a little while."

"Gee, Pete, I'm sorry." Joe's grin, what with one thing and another, was more of embarrassment than amusement.

"Yeah." Pete rose to his feet like an old man. His joints cracked audibly. He smothered another yawn and went on, "Well, I'm glad you're sorry. I'm sorry, too—I have to go to school tomorrow. Where were you?"

Joe told him about the manifolds and he was immediately enthusiastic. "Why didn't you say so? Let's put them on!"

"They won't be ready until eight-thirty in the morning."

"You left here," said Pete, "around five. Last time I looked at a clock it was nearing midnight, and I don't know how long ago that was. Did you walk to town and back?"

Joe answered lamely, "I had to explain what I wanted."

He began touching fresh enamel on the tail of the midget. A tacky spot seemed to interest him enormously.

"Well," said Pete, "you missed a man."

"Who?"

"I don't know. Ma has his name and address. He's from some place in Missouri. He wants you to drive a big job in some tests there on Saturday. He says it's custom-built, with a two-cycle, rotary-valve engine."

"Long distance stuff." Joe didn't appear to be impressed. Anybody would have thought it was an offer to let him drive a hay wagon.

"It sounds pretty good, Joe. It may mean Indianapolis for you next year."

"Yeah—well——"

Pete came over and peered into his face. "What's happened to you?"

"The future of racing," said Joe, "is in the midgets." His eyes were fixed on a horseshoe that hung from a nail on a beam.

"You mean you're not going?"

"Every big-car driver ends up in a plaster cast." Joe sounded as if he were repeating something he had memorized.

"Come on to bed," said Pete. "And sleep it off!" Yanking the wire to the trouble lamp from the socket, he stumbled out into the moonlight.

Joe groped for the door and called, "What's the rush?"

The answer floated derisively from the shadows near the house. "'The future of racing is in the midgets!' You did some detouring down Division Street too."

Next afternoon there was a heavy shower in the eastern portion of the state. The rain let up before sunset, but it left Temple Speedway muddy and dangerous. The back stretch was little better than a hog wallow. A low spot opposite the grandstand looked like a marsh.

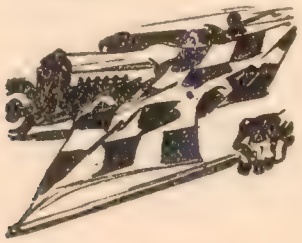
The meet should have been canceled. At the Center City Stadium it would have been. There, the authorities refused to let the drivers risk their lives when the track was in poor condition.

Recalling this humane practice, Pete was all ready to turn the Chevvy around and go home. But Temple Speedway was run on a different plan. The stands were dry—that was the important item.

The stands were dry and there were plenty of customers. Cars were jammed up for a mile on the highway.

So the ticket windows opened, and the floodlights bloomed.

Pete and his helpers—the same two—started unloading Twenty-two. Joe went to the office under the grandstand to sign the track release:



"I hereby waive all claim of any nature whatsoever against the Temple Speedway Racing Association for personal injury to me, and/or to property in my possession; and I do hereby——"

Writing his name, Joseph Buckley Bennett, he slipped the pen behind the steward's ear and strolled out. He was grinning at a thought that had come to him. Maybe there was a trick clause near the bottom of that document.

Maybe he had agreed to pay for any damage he might do. He might have to pay for new planks if he rammed his head through the crash fence.

BURKE'S truck rolled in and stopped at the first pit. The crew hopped off and hooked runways to the tail. Number Six slid proudly down the incline.

Joe sauntered over to the midget. The front springs were blunt on the ends—nothing there to cut a tire. He bent down for a closer inspection.

A hand gripped his shoulder. Joe spun around.

Danny Burke, immaculate in white flyings togs and crash helmet, asked politely, "Looking for something?"

"No." Joe's reply was equally polite. "I was just asking Number Six a question. I was asking if Twenty-two would have a blowout tonight."

"What's Six got to do with that?"

Four years of racing had left their marks on Burke. His face was badly scarred. A livid welt that zig-zagged down his left cheek glowed suddenly.

A beam from red headlights cut across the pits. The ambulance was taking its station in the infield.

An outboard blatted around the track. The sickening exhaust fumes—burning castor-oil and alcohol—spread over the Speedway. Heavy blue smoke hung like a fog under the floodlights.

Burke thrust out his chin pugnaciously. "Want to take it up with the Commission?"

"No," said Joe. "Nor do I want a lawyer. Only don't do any more fancy driving near my tires."

He turned his back and walked toward his own pit. It was time for Twenty-two to warm up.

When the gong rang for the first heat, he pulled into line and waited for the starting signal. His eyes drifted along the grandstand in search of a green hat. There were so many that he had to give up.

Since Twenty-two had no record on the circuit, Joe was well up toward the front in third position. At Temple Speedway, all the races were "inverted starts." That is, the fastest car—as determined by previous performance—was last. In the feature, however, the midgets lined up as they had finished in the semi-finals.

The selective process in the heats was a promoter's trick to increase the excitement. Because of it, the better midgets had to thread through all the junk in order to qualify.

Invariably the coughing relics were assigned first place. Sometimes one would spring a surprise and step out, but this was most unusual. Ordinarily they wabbled into the infield along about the third lap—finished for the evening.

THE green flag dropped. The midgets were off to a flying start.

It wasn't much like flying. Not on that muddy track. The drivers rounded the turns like nervous old ladies piloting electric runabouts.

Joe passed the leading car—a worn-out cycle job. Then he himself was passed by an outboard.

Two more whined by. He did not try to oppose them although his little red car had power to spare. He was satisfied so long as he stayed among the first five. That would qualify Twenty-two for the semi-final.

Perhaps motor trouble would develop as a result of the change in carburetion. Perhaps not.

In case it did, there was still a chance. He would enter the Consolation Race. The winner of that event was allowed to compete in the feature—to wag the tail of the procession in last place.

Joe allowed no one else to pass him, and finished fourth.

"Does she handle all right?" Pete called as Twenty-two came off the oval.

She's got more soup than I can use in this mud," Joe answered.

He glanced hurriedly at the crowd that was circulating around the refreshment booths and the pits. But if the important green hat was there at all, he couldn't locate it.

He solaced himself with soda-pop and treated the boys to hot-dogs.

Burke was last in the semi-final—the scratch man. His crew shoved Six to the starting line and he sauntered to it. The fans cheered. He waved, and bowed, and hopped into his car like a monkey.

Good old Danny—how they loved him!

And what a pretty sight it would be when he flung his sleek midget through heavy traffic—nine cars—to try for the lead. A great little driver, Danny. They could always count on him for a thrill.

The announcer shouted, "Watch Twenty-two, folks. The red job in second spot. Maybe Six is in for some competition tonight. Anything can happen on a slippery track. And 'Wild' Joe Bennett had that red car right out in front for a while in Center City—"

Twenty-two took the lead in the back stretch. It roared past the grandstand on the second lap a hundred yards ahead of the other racers.

Number Six was pocketed behind three outboards. Burke tried frantically to pass them. He steered toward the infield. He slanted back toward the grandstand. Again and again he aimed for an opening that was gone before he could reach it.

Six wormed to the outside on a curve. Mud from the spinning tires spattered against the black-and-white striped crash fence. The midget's nose pushed into the clear. It began to reach out after Twenty-two.

Joe pressed down on the accelerator and smiled at the answering surge of power. The exhaust throbbed steadily, smoothly.

High above him the loudspeakers sang, "Wild Joe is keeping ahead of trouble. He's a nice little distance from trouble."

The Harley engine skipped a beat. It

picked up, skipped again, and commenced to sputter. Six gained rapidly.

JOE angled for the south turn. The motor stalled and the wheels locked. Twenty-two spun so suddenly that he could do no more than hang on.

The other racers shot by. Each one kicked a derisive contribution of mud at the man and his midget.

The race continued under the yellow flag—caution. Track attendants scurried out like scared ants to shove the stalled car into the grass-covered infield.

Joe unstrapped his safety belt, clambered out, and walked to the low benches near the ambulance. He sat there until the race was over and Burke was receiving the plaudits of the fans.

Pete and his helpers came out for Twenty-two and pushed it to the pits. Pete unclamped the hood.

Joe pulled him away. "Don't bother," he said shortly. "I'm through for the night."

"It can't be much," said Pete. "She did all right until she balked."

"I tell you I'm through." Joe tossed his crash helmet at the midget and rubbed the mud off his lips with his sleeve. Then he relented because Pete looked so downcast. "Look if you want to."

Pete bent over the carburetors. "Funny —there seems to be plenty of gas."

"I guess," said Joe, "that my idea about manifolds is not so good. Maybe I don't know enough about air-cooled engines. Maybe the trouble is due to a vapor lock—"

The gong was sounded for the second semi-final. Mil' Graham —wearing a *red* beret—dodged between two cars that were moving toward the track.

"I was in the grandstand," she said breathlessly. "Way at the other end. What happened?"

"Hello, Mil'," said Joe. He was all smiles.

"What happened?" she repeated.

She seemed to be more interested in the doodle than in the man who drove it!

Joe said curtly, "Your guess is as good as mine. Ask him." He flipped a hand at the only part of his brother that showed.

Pete's voice came up tinny from underneath the car, "Something is wrong with the fuel line."

She nodded. "That's why then."

Joe forgot he was annoyed. "Why what?"

"Why Danny Burke came over here and unscrewed the cap on your gasoline tank. I thought it was queer, but you know how he is."

"No." Joe shook his head slowly. "I don't know how he is. But I'm beginnnig to get an idea. What did he do?"

"Well, every meet he walks around and looks at all the midgets. Quite a while ago I asked him why he did it. He said that drivers sometimes have hooks and things on the front end which might rip a tire."

"I got it from him too," said Joe softly. "A demonstration."

"I was on my way here," Mil' went on. "I saw him standing by the tail of Twenty-two. He was unscrewing the cap."

"When was this?"

"Right after your heat."

"What else did he do?"

MIL' shook her head. "There wasn't anything else. He put the cap on again and returned to his own pit. The next race had started. You weren't in sight, so I went back to the grandstand. I didn't think any more about it until just now.

"I still don't see how he could have done anything."

"He did plenty!" said Pete, holding out a cupped hand. "Here is some of the gravel that he dropped into the tank. It plugged the feed right at the strainer. It fooled me because there was gasoline in

the float chamber. I guess it oozed through while Twenty-two was in the infield."

Joe's face wore a wry smile. "Well, Mil', it looks like movies for us on Saturday."

Pete quoted solemnly, "'The future of racing is in the midgets.'" Then he stepped back so that Twenty-two made a barricade between him and Joe. "Excuse me. I was thinking out loud."

The other two paid him no attention.

"Would it bother you much," Joe asked Mil', "if I was to leave you for a while? I want to talk to Burke."

She gave him stare for stare. "I don't blame you. But hadn't you better wait until after the races?"

Joe looked at Pete. "Can we get it running?"

"The strainer," said Pete, "is clogged. Pebbles are still in the tank. We'll have to take it off to shake them out. And the Consolation will be coming up in a few minutes."

"Then I don't see any sense in waiting," said Joe, glancing at Burke's pit. "So if—"

"On second thought," said Mil', "I think the thing to do is to get another car and beat him in the Final."

Joe grinned in spite of everything. "The Commission wouldn't let me race in the Chevvy."

"There are seven extra midgets here tonight," said Mil'. "One of them will take Twenty-two's place in the Consolation."

Joe shook his head. "I'd be a fool to attempt anything in one of those heaps."

"A man named Pantorelli owns one of them," said Mil'. "Seventy-one. I heard him telling the announcer during the intermission. I was right in front of a loudspeaker and the microphone was picking up every word. His driver didn't show up."

Joe raised an eyebrow at his brother. "Did you hear that? Pantorelli!"

He turned again to Mil'. "Pantorelli owns a junk-yard in Falls Center. The boys call him 'Graveyard Tony.' He built a string of racers out of some wrecks he didn't sell for old iron. I've driven some of them. A 'Pantorelli Special' never finishes in the money unless everything else on the track folds up."

Pete said thoughtfully, "Seventy-one—" He looked at Mil'. "A Seventy-one was mentioned in that copy of *Racing News* in your showroom. It's a National Association job. It was a winner back East and it's competing in Detroit."

"What," asked Joe, "would Pantorelli be doing with it?"

"Maybe it tangled and he picked it up cheap," Pete suggested.

"Maybe he built a midget and gave it the first number which entered his head," Joe answered.

Mil' caught his arm. "Go see him before it's too late."

Joe looked down at her hand. She pulled it away as if his sleeve were hot.

"All right, Mil'," he said. "I'll see him."

GRAVEYARD TONY, a mountain of a man much too healthy-looking for his nickname, was sitting glumly in the last pit on the tail of Seventy-one. The car, in appearance at least, was all that Joe had expected it would be. It had a slight list to port—like a tramp steamer with its cargo shifted—and the paint, a glossy black pimpled with dust, showed countless brush marks and dents.

"My crate is through for the night," Joe informed the fat man. "I've been thinking maybe you'd like me to try for the Consolation in this one."

Tony bounced to his feet and pointed a pudgy finger at a rear wheel. "Look, Joey," he said enthusiastically. "New tires! On account of the mud."

Joe grinned. "They'll outlast the car."

"A J.A.P. motor is inside," said Tony. "And it's almost new. The outsides don't count. Let's find the steward."

The Consolation—"Suicide Race"—was the bright spot of the evening. The clown event. A soap-box derby plus gasoline. It was the training school for new riders in strange vehicles, and Seventy-one was the queerest of the lot.

The dented midget handled beautifully however. From last position it gunned

through seven entrants and lapped the field.

The oil line broke on the last turn. Luckily Joe was able to kick the motor out of gear. Momentum carried the car across the finish line, and it won the race.

Tony had no spare tubing with which to make the repair—he hadn't so much as a spare spark-plug. So he went hunting.

Somewhere, somehow, he dug up a thin copper pipe. It wasn't the right size, but it could be made to fit. He set to work.

In the meanwhile Joe had disappeared. Pete in turn did some hunting and dug him out of the grandstand "way at the other end."

The Final was a fast race in spite of the danger. The drivers, all experienced men, weren't letting anything pass without a struggle.

Seventy-one was in last place. There was very little chance that it would catch Six, which was leading.

Joe was covered with mud before he reached the first turn. He was worried about the oil line too. It had broken once and it might break again, especially since it was now a makeshift replacement.

He wondered where Tony had found it. On a parked car most likely.

The Final at Temple Speedway ran for twenty-five laps. Five miles. Only two of those laps had been run when the first accident occurred.

An orange-and-blue midget hit the south turn too fast and looped. Two more climbed over it into the crash fence. The track attendants cleared off the wreckage and the ambulance got busy while the race went on "under caution."

Joe was still last. But there were only nine cars to pass now. If only he could catch that green-and-chromium job!

Well, when the green flag waved all-clear he would try. At least he would give the J.A.P. an opportunity to show what it could do.

Now!

The accelerator touched bottom. Seventy-one screamed past one, two, three, four blurred shapes and broadsided toward the fence.

Joe fought the wheel like a maniac. His foot jabbed at the accelerator before he was out of danger.

It was crazy. He was throwing away the chance of placing. Risking his neck!

He missed the cable in front of the stand by an inch.

The starter crossed the green and white flags and semaphored. The race was half run. Twelve more laps. Five more cars to Danny.

AHEAD an outboard coughed. Seventy-one passed it in a leap. Another one wavered across the track into the infield.

Two cars were fighting for second place. The drivers were busy with each other, blinded by mud, deafened by their exhausts and the roar of the crowd. They did not notice Seventy-one creeping up.

They came out of the turn too close, touched, and shied away. The battered black car shot through the opening.

Six and Seventy-one throttled for the next curve almost abreast. Danny swung Six across the track. A deliberate attempt to sideswipe Seventy-one into the infield!

Joe slammed on the brakes. The mid-

get started to spin. He gunned the motor and it straightened out.

That was close!

For a moment the stands were hushed. Then someone booed. Others joined in. The flood of sound drowned the noise of the motors.

The fans were booing Danny Burke!

Six and Seventy-one were on the turn. Six was still a little ahead on the outside.

You can kill a man in a midget when he's a little ahead and on the outside. Danny Burke slowed.

Joe slowed too. He edged the black midget toward the one of green and chromium. Number Six gave way toward the fence.

Danny could do one of three things; hold his course and risk a tangle, ease away and crash, or try to shoot ahead. Number Six shot ahead.

It was heavier than Seventy-one by at least three hundred pounds and more than twice as powerful. But it could not build up any lead. The straightaways were too short. The dented black midget followed easily.

Joe did not try for the lead. He had recalled the question Mil' had asked at the soda fountain: "Why doesn't someone ride Danny Burke right off the track?"

He was beginning to think he could do it.

Danny himself suggested the method. He had slowed in the mire on the back stretch. Joe, no more than three feet behind, did not use the brake soon enough. And Seventy-one nudged Six.

Joe remembered the nudging that had been done in Center City. Now Danny would be treated to a few doses of his own medicine. Not on the curves where it would be dangerous, but on the straightaways where it would be ignominious.

And then on the last turn Seventy-one would pass—— Well, the next to the last turn. It would be foolish to wait until the last one.

The queer chase began. Number Six tried desperately to get away. Seventy-one kept nudging.

Lap after lap the black car went through the same maneuver. It dropped back a bit as if it were exhausted. Danny heaved a sigh of relief. Every one began to think it was through.

And then it picked up speed and nudged again!

ON THE back stretch with one lap to go Danny Burke made his final attempt to get away. He held the throttle open a moment too long. The tires chewed into chocolate pudding in the soft spot. The wheels spun so fast that they looked like solid disks of chromium.

Number Six ploughed a double furrow toward the crash fence. Rocketed sideways for fifty feet. Caromed off the pole where the loudspeakers hung.

Joe ducked as he flashed by. The green-and-chromium midget was upside down in an end-over-end.

Behind Joe on the track a figure crawled out of the mud and staggered into the infield. Off in the tall grass men hastened with fire-extinguishers toward a sudden burst of yellow flame.

Joe Bennett hardly realized that he had won until he was in the pits. Tony slapped him on the back and shouted, "Last week she was junk! This week she's in the money! Not so bad, believe me!"

Joe flexed his cramped leg muscles. "Was Burke hurt?"

"Mud," said Tony scornfully, "don't hurt to fall in. But the man who owns Six! I offered him twenty dollars for it and I thought he was going to try to kill me. Then I took the money out of my pocket and he said, 'I'm damned if I don't!' And he grabbed it and went away."

"Six must be pretty well melted down," said Joe absently. He was craning his neck to see over the heads of the advancing fans.

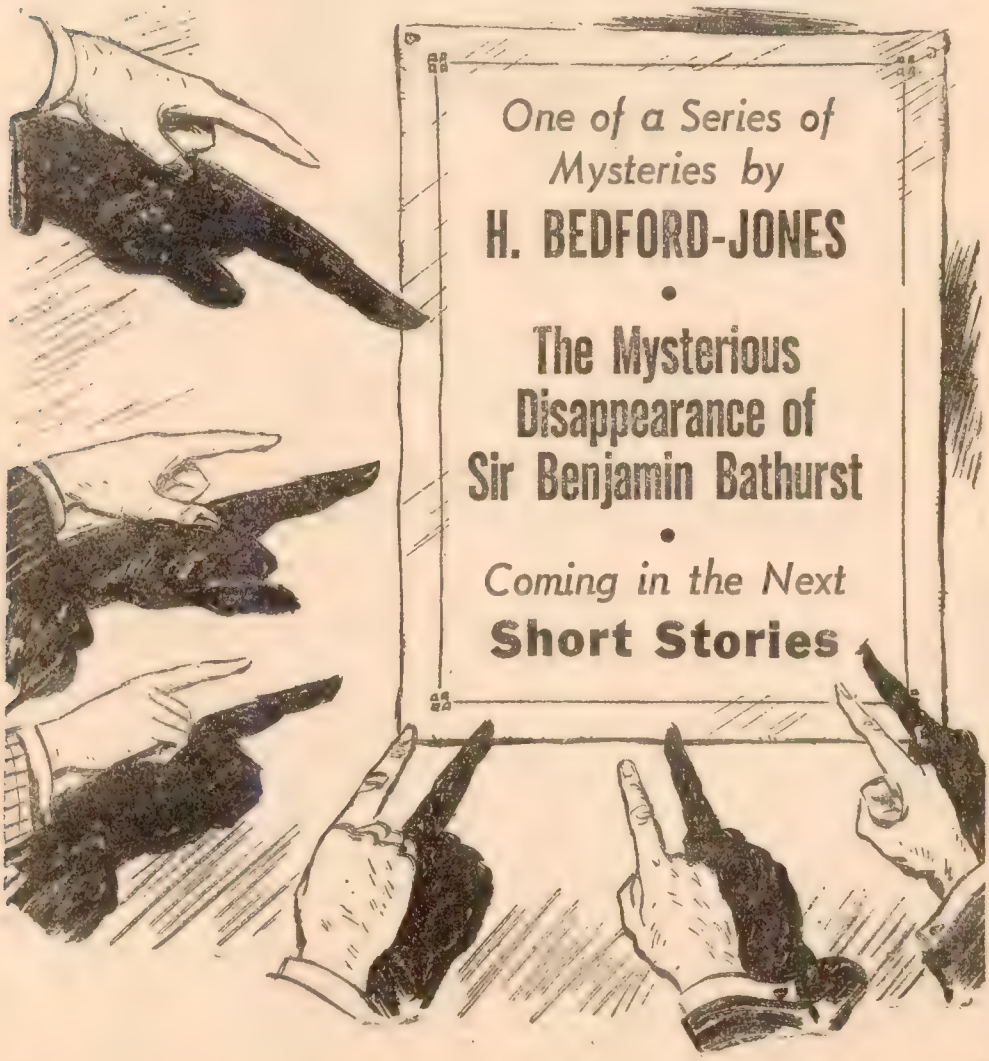
"That," said Tony, "shows how much you know. It needs only paint and wire. And the dents smoothed out. I got men working who know how to fix dents. You should have seen Seventy-one. And there is plenty of paint in the Five and Dime. All colors. And I already have got lots of wire. Maybe you will drive her, Joey, when she is fixed?"

Joe didn't say anything. He had caught sight of the red beret and he was already pushing through the crowd.

Behind him Pete said, "Mil' came all the way from Center by herself. Don't let her drive all the way back alone. Go with her. I'll take care of the doodle."

Joe hesitated. "I don't want to run off and leave you with all—" He looked wistful.

"No," said Pete, grinning, "I know you don't want to run off. Only for a little while. Like last night." He gave his brother a shove. "Get going. I've got a movie date for Saturday myself. And wash your face first, Joe. It's full of mud."



A Sort of Makeshift Repair Job—That's a Softpatch in Any Man's Navy

SOFTPATCH

By ROY CHURCHILL

Author of "In Harm's Way," "According to Plan," etc.

INSTEAD of parade and liberty at Pedro or Diego or Frisco, the regular places when coming off sea duty; the U. S. S. *Alaska* drew a small town up the coast for the Armistice Day assignment. A Navy minded senator lived up there, member of the Naval Committee, and he pressured the base admiral to give his home folks a real battle-wagon during the holiday. It made votes.

After the parade Pete Ramsey and Niff Hardy, in Softpatch's division, walked out the main street a dozen blocks to the country, and Pete put up a dollar that a fuzzy black-and-tan caterpillar humping itself straight across the concrete, couldn't make it to the other side before a car reduced it to a grease spot.

"That worm," Pete said, "reminds me of Softpatch. He'll never make it. He'll try hard. Keep humping. But a car will cross his trajectory—Mattie."

Cars were coming steadily, and Niff argued that the danger zone being only a foot wide for each wheel track, the worm had a chance, making seven humps to cover the foot in ten seconds, but that he ought to have odds.

While they watched, Softpatch drove up in a rented Jelopy, pulled off the side

of the road and offered them a lift. They got in and Niff paid Pete the dollar. The right rear wheel had settled the bet when Softpatch pulled away from the center.

That was Softpatch doing his best. Going out of his way to help somebody and getting the law of averages jammed up.

Mattie, the *Alaska's* exec, had given Lon Tobin his nickname one morning at mast. Lon had tried to help out a shipmate overtime from liberty. After the exec had sentenced the shipmate, he had turned on Tobin in the same hard-cut manner that had gibed his own name down from Commander Matthew Doane to Mattie. "Tobin," he'd said, "you're trying to put a softpatch on O'Brien's story, when what it needs is riveting with iron."

The Naval Manual says a softpatch is a sheet of lead to tack over a hole to stop a leak when a boat gets stove in. A sort of makeshift repair until the carpenter's gang can put in new planks and make a permanent job.

Softpatch. The name stuck because it fitted.

Commander Matthew Doane was thin and severe. Professor of Mathematics at the Academy for a couple of terms. Everything on the rule. No temporary jobs or leftover fractions. Two-and-two adding up to four with nothing left over or under.

Softpatch couldn't be that way. He was put together different. At twenty-two, long and strong, big handed and soft hearted, he was a regular for overtime around any machine. Running about smoothing things out, patching here and there so they'd work another day, he got to be Mattie's pet example of what shouldn't be. It looked bad for the thing he'd set his heart on. A chance at Machinists' School at Newport. A course that led up to Warrant. A technical job on torpedoes and gauges and sights so important that the Navy hands good men around from ship to ship like admirals. Softpatch had it all figured out, up to a point.

But the point was Commander Matthew Doane. And executive officers make the appointments.

PETE settled back against the knobby cushions of the Jelopy's rear seat. "Where you been, Softpatch?" he inquired.

"Up to the senator's house, with his drunk houseboy. Was afraid he'd lose his job." Softpatch slid soundlessly into low gear, and they moved sluggishly forward.

"Them big brown eyes look puzzled and sort of absentminded," Niff observed, reslamming the rickety front door on his side. "What's got you worried?"

"This guy says he was on the gunboat where I put in my first cruise. Seemed to know me." Softpatch wanted to know if Pete and Niff would go back with him to the senator's house. "It wasn't the year I was on the gunboat," he said.

"You said he was drunk," Pete reminded him. "Forget it."

"I better go see." When Softpatch got stubborn it wasn't any more use opposing him than trying to persuade the worm they'd bet on not to cross the road. So Pete and Niff gave up.

The senator's house, high on a hill thickly planted with old live oak trees, set well back behind big iron gates, standing open, appeared to be deserted. At the end of the flower bordered driveway they got out, and Pete found a bell marked "Service," and pressed it. Almost before the tinkle of sound inside faded out—too quick entirely—the door swung open, and a big marine sergeant and a couple of shore patrols, all carrying clubs, filled it up completely. "You're under arrest," the sergeant said. "Wanted on the ship." His two helpers stepped down to the flank.

"We're not overtime on liberty," Softpatch said. "I'm looking for a houseboy I brought up here awhile ago. You seen

anything of him? I want to know if he made it all right."

"He's gone," the marine answered, "and he made it all right with what he was after."

SOFTPATCH didn't like marines. He particularly didn't like this marine. "What did he do?" he challenged.

The marine moved down beside his detail. "The senator borrowed some plans off the admiral. He left them here when he went to town. Now they're gone."

"The sights of the new air defense gun," Softpatch said.

"So you know all about it," the sergeant cut in. "What they are and everything. I thought so. Talked yourself into a stranglehold. Selling out for easy money."

"What would I want to get anybody to steal them for?" Softpatch protested. "I worked on them, and I could draw a set from memory and mail it to him."

"You can argue with a General Court. We're riding with you down to the ship and the brig. You'll probably get ten years."

The three marines closed in. Softpatch didn't answer, but walked over toward the car.

"Softpatch hasn't done a thing on purpose," Pete said. "He stumbles into these jams. We didn't even see the houseboy, Niff and me. All we did was ride up here. You can't take us."

The big marine wiggled his stick and pointed with it to the back seat of the car. "Who says I can't? he said. "Pile in there."

THEY were the only ones in the brig. "What's the chance of clearing this up?" Pete said to Softpatch when the three were looking at four steel walls, with bars at the ports, and at the door into the passage.

"These are new plans," Softpatch said. "The gunner let me help with a couple of gadgets I made for him in the machine shop. They're so good that the newest boot in the division couldn't miss." He sat down on a bunk and began running his fingers through his hair.

Pete and Niff looked at one another, and Pete walked two fingers up his sleeve like a worm humping across the road.

Softpatch began to walk up and down. "What I've got to do is find that fellow and get them away from him," he said, looking out the port and fingering the bars.

"You couldn't find him if you were out of here," Niff said.

"I know where to go." Softpatch stopped decisively. "Watch the sentry through the door. If he starts to look in, cough or something. It'll take me about ten minutes to get out."

"You're crazy," Pete said, but he went to the door and looked out between the bars.

Softpatch got a piece of soap from the washroom, and unclamped the fat fountain pen that was sticking in his blouse the way all sailors carry them, well hidden under the neckerchief knot. Unscrewed, it wasn't a pen at all, but the neatest kit of burglar tools that anybody ever saw. He had made them, he said, during spare time in the machine shop.

"This door goes into the sickbay storeroom. It'll be locked, but its passage door is out of the sentry's beat. That's the way I'll go." Softpatch knelt by the door and went to work. The soap kept the little saw from making much noise and the drill cut into the iron as if it was wood. Softpatch had picked nothing but high speed

steel for his tools. The sentry had not heard a thing when the prisoner got up from his knees and pulled the first door open.

"You two clean up the dirt I make and rub some soap in the holes while I get the other door open. I won't leave until after it's time to change the sentry. Then I'll have the time of a whole two-hour watch. Before it's up, I'll be back in here with you. Make a dummy with the bedding on the bunk, and when the sentry looks in, tell him I'm asleep."

HE wasn't asking them to do the things he outlined. He was telling them. Giving orders. His big jaws were clamped and his eyes were bright and hard now, instead of dreamy and soft. So Pete and Niff did what he told them.

Time passed so slowly for them after he left they began to doubt his return. But with five minutes of the two hours to spare, Softpatch was back in the brig.

A good thing it was, too, for he had no sooner worked the bolts back into place than a messenger brought him a summons to report to the exec's office.

Commander Matthew Doane let Softpatch stand at attention for a full minute before he made a move or said anything. For all of the sixty long-count seconds he acted as if Softpatch were some sort of a statue standing there, while he sat behind his desk and let his eyes play over him, taking in every special detail of how Softpatch's uniform fit, his damp shoes, his bruised eye, even the way Softpatch breathed, easy but deep, and how steady his eyes were when he looked straight into them. Then he said, starting something as if he already knew the answer, "Tobin, just why were you placed in the brig?"

Softpatch began to speak as if a valve had been turned, as if reading a speech long memorized. "I was ashore, sir, and helped a fellow, that I once was shipmates with, back to the senator's house up on the hill. He said he was a houseboy there. I delivered him at the drive. Then I went back to town. But I remembered, thinking about it, that he told me the wrong year, so I drove back with Ramsey and Hardy to check up. He didn't need to be so anxious to get there. The senator was in town at a luncheon. I got curious."

Softpatch stopped talking. The exec had been drawing little squares on a sheet of paper and he looked up as if surprised. "Then?" he prompted. "Go on. What happened?" He pointed the pencil at Softpatch as if he were a bandmaster and wanted a certain note from him, and it had better be the right one.

"The marines were there, sir," Softpatch said, acting just as surprised as the exec. "They brought us off and put us in the brig."

"What for?" Mattie shot out the two words and made a beat with the pencil.

"Some plans were gone, the marine said. He thought I was mixed up in taking them."

"Were you?"

"No, sir."

"Would you know the plans if you saw them?"

"Yes, sir."

THE exec opened a drawer and pulled out a roll of blue prints and spread them on the desk, holding them flat. "Are these the ones?" he asked. One of his hands covered the title so that Softpatch could not read the legend on the margin.

"Not the corrected ones, sir," Softpatch said promptly.

The exec let the stiff paper roll up. He snapped a rubber band around it and dropped it in the drawer and took out another roll. Red clay had dried on the back of it and smeared along the edges. The exec unrolled it and looked up at Softpatch. "Is this the important set?" he asked with innocent softness.

"Yes, sir," Softpatch said quickly. "I'm

glad it has been recovered, if it was stolen."

"So you did have a hand in this affair." The exec's tone was pleased, as if he had been waiting to get Softpatch on a spot, and now he had him. He was a little contemptuous, too, as if trapping Softpatch had been childishly easy.

"I don't understand you, sir," Softpatch said.

"You couldn't possibly know these plans apart unless you were guiltily familiar with them," the exec said sternly.

Softpatch maintained his calm. "But I could know them apart. The gunner got me to make a couple of pieces in the machine shop. We went over the two plans together."

The exec looked at Softpatch for another long minute. He had maneuvered Softpatch into a corner and Softpatch had ducked out into the clear with one step. "You could ask the gunner, sir," Softpatch said brightly.

"I'll verify that another way." The exec was grim. Getting a knockout on Softpatch would take better aim. "You boasted to the sergeant that you could make a sketch from memory. We'll see how well you get along with it. Begin now. You may sit at the desk. Put in the changes and improvements that you went over with the gunner." He rolled a pencil toward Softpatch and took a square of paper from a box.

Softpatch took a book for a ruler and began to make lines and angles. The exec lighted a cigarette and blew smoke toward the skylight, watching it eddy up to the ventilator, but watching Softpatch more. After awhile he took a slide rule from a box of drawing instruments and shoved it to Softpatch.

SOFTPATCH put down the book, murmured thanks, and began to use the tool skillfully; and after that, one by one, the exec laid out the other things that the box contained. Softpatch used them with ease, when they were needed. The exec got up from the desk and came behind him and leaned over his shoulder.

"This is the part, sir, that's different," Softpatch said. "This gear ratio is adjusted to the ship's speed, after corrections for sea, current and wind, but it fouled here. Not enough clearance. We raised the cam five millimeters."

"That will do," the exec said. "It's a good piece of work. Commendable drawing. You have a good memory." He lighted one end of the paper and when it burned to his fingers crushed the smoldering fragments into an ash tray. "The gunner can tell me, of course, if you had the plans long enough, from him, to make this demonstration."

"We worked for a week, sir, off and on. That's why I told the marine I didn't have to steal the plans when I could make a set." Softpatch looked hopefully at the exec. "May I go now, sir?"

"I will tell you when to go," the exec said ominously, and sat down again and motioned Softpatch to stand at ease. He took the corrected plans from the drawer and tapped the roll thoughtfully into his palm. "These plans, the stolen ones, were recovered within a few hours. Someone telephoned anonymously from a pay booth that they could be found in the senator's rose garden, in the center of the third row from the walk. Have you anything further to say?"

"No, sir." If Softpatch knew what was coming he did not show it. Not a muscle twitched. His voice held steady.

"The fingerprints here, and here, are yours." The exec pointed to smudges on the roll. "They are in grease, probably made when you and the gunner handled them. They are quite clear and correspond with your record fingerprinting." His voice was conversationally deceptive. Casual. But Softpatch was not deceived. It was as if the exec sighted a rifle on a target that he had maneuvered into range.

"We had them in the shop where there's

oil and grease." Softpatch was apologetic. "We intended making a clean copy when all the changes were checked."

THE exec unrolled the paper a trifle. His eyes were faintly amused, but as sharp as glass. Neatly and expertly he had led Softpatch into his trap. "This thumb print here is yours also," he said. "Not made in grease, but in red mud from the senator's garden. You are clever, Tobin. Too clever. You even contrive to look innocent. I have underrated you. But just why did you decide to return the plans and have an accomplice telephone? Were you planning to make a new set from memory, as you have demonstrated so clearly? Or have you already done so?"

"All I did was to save them, and get them back where they belong," Softpatch said with spirit. "It looked like the best way."

"Any court with the evidence so far would put you in prison. If at war, hang you," the exec shot at him. "You and the houseman stole the plans on your first trip to the senator's house. You buried them in the rose garden, and fingerprinted them carelessly with red mud. You went back with Ramsey and Hardy and were arrested. You have been in the brig since. What made you try to undo what you had started by having your accomplice telephone? That tripped you up. Something always does. Was it your conscience?"

Softpatch squirmed. "I'd better tell you all of it," he said. "I got out of the brig and went after the plans myself. This houseman wasn't hard to find. I took the plans away from him, and then I hid them in the rose garden and telephoned. Then I came back to the ship. That's the truth, Mr. Doane!"

The exec was sitting forward intently. What Softpatch was saying seemed unbelievable, yet his words did have the ring of sober truth. "You escaped from the brig? Went ashore?"

"Yes, sir. I can prove how I got out. I washed my shoes, but my civilian suit is in my locker, with red mud on it." Softpatch was talking man-to-man. A gleam in the exec's eyes gave him courage.

"This is how I got out." Softpatch began dissembling the false fountain pen with deft motions. "Ask Pete and Niff. They didn't help—only to make a dummy and put it in the bunk to fool the sentry. They'll know how long I was gone."

"I believe you," the exec interrupted angrily. "No one else could be as foolish and devious."

Softpatch hurried on. "Those fellows always have a club. I went there and asked a man at the desk for Frank. That's the houseman's name. He heard me and came out of a side door from another room. I saw the plans on a table in there. So I rushed him, grabbed them, and went out a window. One or two tried to stop me. I skinned my knuckles, but still it was kind of easy. It wouldn't do to make a second try, though. They'd be watching for it."

"Second try?" the exec asked.

"Yes, sir. I planned to go again. Slip out of the brig tonight. They had the plans an hour or so before I could get there. They could have started on a copy. I wanted that, too. Don't you see, sir, that I couldn't report this? Nobody would have believed me, and I had to hurry. I had to do the best I could. Will you let me go ashore again?"

"Softpatching!" the exec said, but he looked at Softpatch speculatively and Softpatch looked at him, as if they were just beginning to get acquainted. "How would you go about it this time?"

"The same as I did before, sir."

The exec put the plans back into the desk and locked it. Then he got up. "I'm going ashore with you," he announced. "Put your fountain pen burglar kit together. We may need it. Get ashore in one of the visiting boats without the officer of the desk seeing you. I will meet

you on the dock. Our attempt must be unofficial."

THE Club was dark and deserted when the commander and Softpatch walked past the first time. The exec was in civilian clothing and Softpatch wore his uniform.

"They're in there," Softpatch whispered as they came by the second time. "Light shining through a slit in the back room window shade. They'll be fixing up all they can remember and guessing at the rest. We could get the shore patrol and raid from the front and rear."

"It wouldn't do." The exec sniffed. "Have you been drinking? You smell awful."

"No, sir," Softpatch said humbly. "But I had a notion I might want to play drunk, so I got some whiskey on the dock while I waited for you. The cork loosened and some of it spilled."

"Not the kind a man would drink," the exec fumed. "Throw the stuff away!"

"I thought about using it to set fire to the building," Softpatch said calmly, and hastened into explanation as the exec gulped. "The place is off to itself, sir. Not much of a building. The people in it would run out, and Frank would run too, and he'd have what we want. He wouldn't try to hide it or leave it to be burned up. That's the idea I had."

"Tobin," the exec said, "how long have you had this idea?"

"All the time, sir. I can't get it out of my mind. I was going to do it myself, but when you came along, I thought maybe we wouldn't have to."

"Certainly we won't have to do it," the exec said quickly. "So you'd fire a building, would you? Been thinking of it from the first. I'll be doubled damned! We'd land in jail. Go up for arson. You must have drunk part of that liquor."

"Maybe we can think of something else, sir." Softpatch was unconvincingly hopeful. "But the fire would make a lot of smoke and noise. We could help put it out when we got the plans back. I'd act drunk. It needn't be a big fire. There's a fire station right around the corner. They'd come quick with extinguishers."

"So you've got the details all worked out! We were just passing by in time to see it, and turned in an alarm." The exec swore again.

SOFTPATCH waited for his poison to work.

"Still, we could wait here all night, hoping the right man comes out with what we want," the exec muttered; and then dismissing temptation joyfully, "There's nothing to make a fire with."

"Today I stumbled over some trash in the alley alongside," Softpatch quelled the revolt eagerly. "Excelsior and old packing stuff. It's damp from lying out in the fog. A couple of newspapers would start it off. We could throw some of it in the broken window. I've got a cigarette lighter, and most of the alcohol to pour on."

"Have you ever set a house afire before?" The exec's question was meant to be sarcastic, but had more wonder and dismay than his attempt at ridicule.

"No, sir, but I keep thinking how easy we could do it this time. And we ought to. Maybe we couldn't make a better air defense sight if this one gets away from

us." Softpatch had all the persuasion of a salesman about to land a prospect.

"Refrain from using we, and think up another plan," the exec ordered sharply. "No sale. It's the wildest thing I ever heard of! Forget it at once."

"Sometimes I can't, sir. When I get a hot one, that's all that will come until I try it. They hit one at a time. I can't crowd them."

They walked past the building again.

"Let's get at it then!" the exec yielded explosively. "These people we're dealing with wouldn't hesitate. I'll stand guard. Be sure your lighter works."

Softpatch went into the narrow cluttered space between the building and a low stuccoed wall. In less than a minute he arranged and lighted the pile of trash. It began to blaze and send out billows of smoke. He and the exec pounded on the door of the club office and shouted "Fire!" at full voice.

Softpatch was coughing from the smoke he had breathed in, getting his wet material well started, and the exec was hesitating between kicking in the door if someone inside did not soon pay attention, and running to a fire alarm box on the corner. It looked as if the building might get start enough to burn to the ground if they had to wait many more seconds.

THE man named Frank was the first to appear. A stocky man, alert and cautious.

Two others had taken a quick look out a window and had gone back. Now the three came at once. Frank carried a briefcase, and the others were empty handed, bareheaded, asking questions excitedly.

Softpatch ran to Frank and took his arm. "Get away from here!" he urged. "The fire is near a gasoline drum back there. It'll explode!"

Frank hung back. He clung tightly to the flat leather case pressed to his side. The fire was dying down.

"I'll take that," Softpatch said, and made a premature grab for the case.

Frank jerked away, crying to his companions for aid, and backing toward the door. He began to suspect what the fire and excitement had been created for. "It's you!" he cried, and broke away. "No you don't. Not this time!"

With a straight left that the exec admired, Softpatch struck Frank on the right temple and toppled him back into the exec's arms. The exec snatched the briefcase as Frank slid to the pavement.

"Run with it!" Softpatch said, and turned to meet the attack of Frank's companions, returning from the smoking alley.

The exec ran. He had what he and Softpatch had come ashore after, and a commander does not get himself arrested for setting fire to alien club headquarters. Softpatch was the one to stay and take the grief, and he and the exec both knew it. But the exec wanted to see Softpatch safely on his way to jail before he abandoned him. He slowed down at the fire box and sent in an alarm. A policeman pounded up and wanted to know what he meant.

The exec saw his course clearly on the instant. "A fire across the block there, officer," he said in his best quarterdeck manner, with a dignity that condescended to thaw only a trifle. "I happened to be passing. Commander Doane of the *Alaska*."

"Yes, sir," replied the representative of law and order. "Fight going on, too! I'll be stepping over there. One of your sailors mixed up in it."

"Arrest the man and hold him for the shore patrol," the exec said. "I can't have my men drunk on the streets. I'm sorry, officer. Do your full duty. Apologies will be sent promptly."

PREPARATIONS for the case against Leonard John Tobin, Machinists' Mate, Second, required a full week. There was much to be done, and many charges to

be made. The exec took an active part in seeing that the prosecution was painstaking in getting the evidence all in order. He had an affidavit from the Chief of Police of the town charging suspicion of arson and resisting an officer. The senator filed a brief, setting forth trespass and unlawful entry. The *Alaska* itself charged going ashore without permission, destroying and damaging government property, and breaking out of the brig by force. Frank, evading investigation, had faded out of the picture.

The Court met and listened to the evidence, and Softpatch looked out a port and acted as blank as a one-week boot, and so humble and respectful that the Base captain acting as judge, wished he had appointed someone else for the defense with more experience than a new ensign.

"Are you guilty or not guilty of these charges?" the judge asked.

"Guilty, sir," Softpatch said.

"Have you anything to say?"

"No, sir."

"Had you been drinking or doing anything that might have caused you to be irresponsible?" the ensign asked.

"No, sir."

"Are you sorry?" The ensign was desperate.

"Oh, yes, sir," Softpatch said, and the Court thought that he meant to add contritely that he would never do these awful things again. But Softpatch only looked at the ensign, and looked away. "Thank you, sir," he mumbled.

Matthew Doane, Executive Officer of the *Alaska*, asked the next question for the prosecution, his voice severe and uncompromising. "Tobin," he said, "all through these depositions runs the hint of an accomplice. The Court wishes to know who helped you take the plans from the senator's residence, and who was with you in the attack on the club."

"Yes, sir," Softpatch answered. "I didn't take the plans, but I thought I knew where they were, so I picked the lock on the brig and went to get them back, if I could, so I would be in the clear."

The exec leaned forward, his blunt finger pointing.

"Who helped you?"

"I bought some whiskey," Softpatch said soberly. "A fat man followed me out of the saloon and went along with me. I couldn't shake him. He said he had a lot of friends in the outfit, and kept asking me questions. When we got to the club I asked him if I set fire to the place would the people inside run out. He said not to do it, but I thought it was a good idea myself, so I did it."

"Would you know that man again?"

"Yes, sir," Softpatch said. "He was fat and had on a gray suit."

The exec sat back in his chair. "That is all," he announced with satisfaction. "The prosecution rests."

The judge nodded to the defending ensign.

"May I recommend my client to the mercy of the Court?" the ensign said. "It is plain to be seen that he is entirely incapable of purposeful wrongdoing. We admit that he has put himself terribly in jeopardy by acts contrary to all Naval regulations and laws, but I feel that he has done so solely through ignorance and stupidity, rather than by malicious intent. May I ask that his sentence be lightened accordingly? The defense prays for clemency, and rests, sir." With his face quite red, the ensign sat down.

A MARINE guard took Softpatch away. The exec leaned his elbows on the table and looked at his finger tips as he placed them carefully together. "As I have before stated," he said, "I arrived at the scene in time to have Tobin arrested. He appeared very drunk. I am inclined to agree with the gentleman for the defense. We have the plans back. But by all means we must punish the

prisoner. I submit two years at hard labor, as fair punishment."

The captain from the Base thought that five would be better, but the other officers were inclined to agree with the exec. He had his way.

Sentence was passed on Softpatch at the mast the next morning. The exec did it coldly and precisely. Pete and Niff shivered as they listened from under the bows of a whaleboat on the boat deck. It seemed a miracle that they had escaped. They did not hear the exec say, in an aside to the marine who was to take Softpatch to the brig, that he wanted to see the prisoner in his office immediately.

"TOBIN," the exec said, when he and Softpatch were alone, "you have heard your sentence. Here are your orders."

As Pete had predicted, Mattie was about to cross Softpatch's trajectory. He paused and looked up at Softpatch, but except for a tightening of Softpatch's jaw, Softpatch absorbed the blow without a tremor.

"To be served," the exec continued, "at the Machinists' School in Newport. Ever hear of it?"

Softpatch felt his hitches slipping.

"I expect you to graduate with all the honors they can give. If you don't, I may revive this affair for my conscience's sake."

"Yes, sir!" Softpatch said. "I'll work hard."

"I want you to know, Tobin, that the briefcase also contained all the notes that outfit of spies has made in a year. We made a clean sweep."

The exec passed over an official envelope.

"Good luck—*Softpatch!*"

"Thanks—*Mattie!*"

Pearls At Quarter Moon

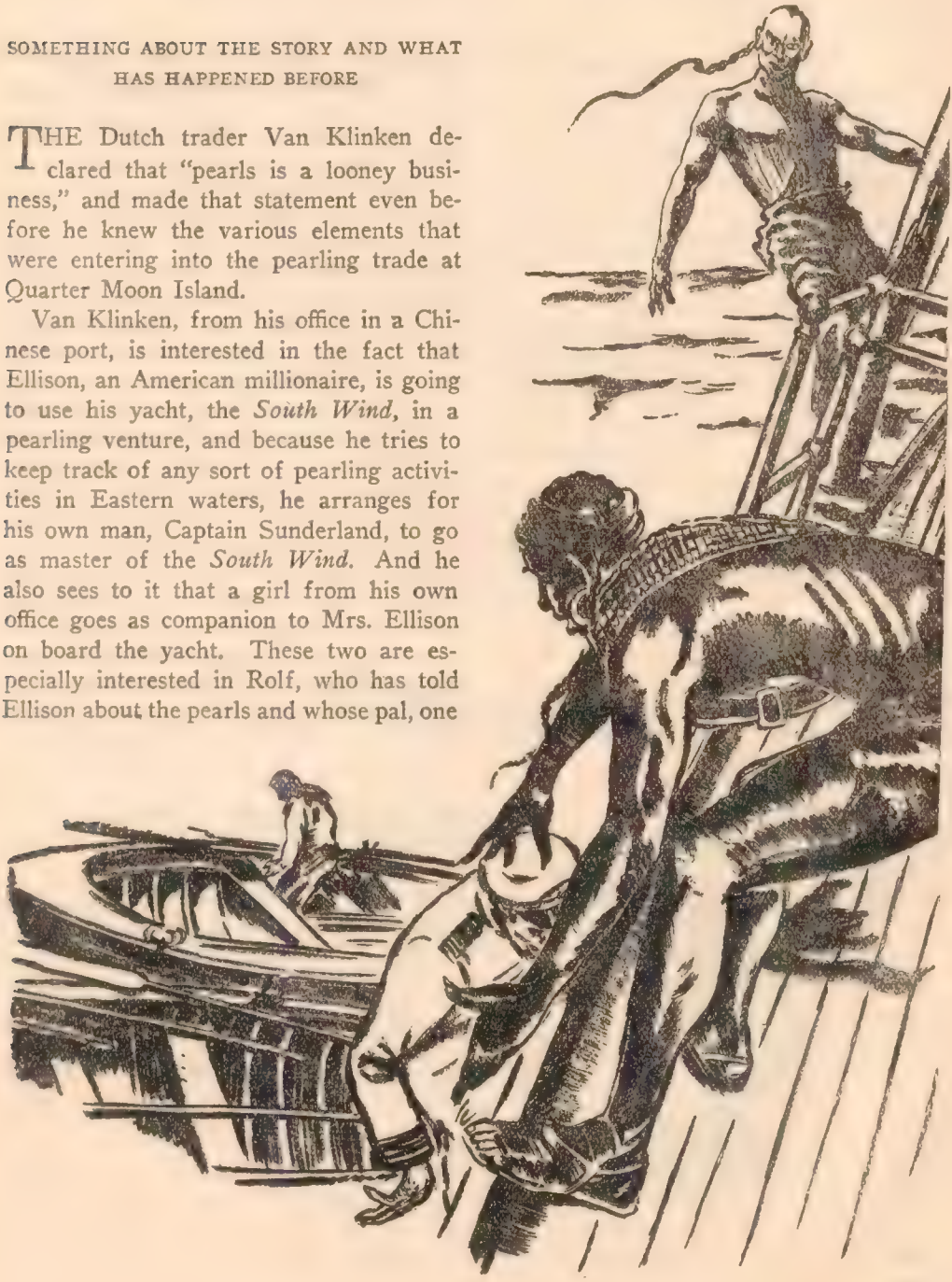
By CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE

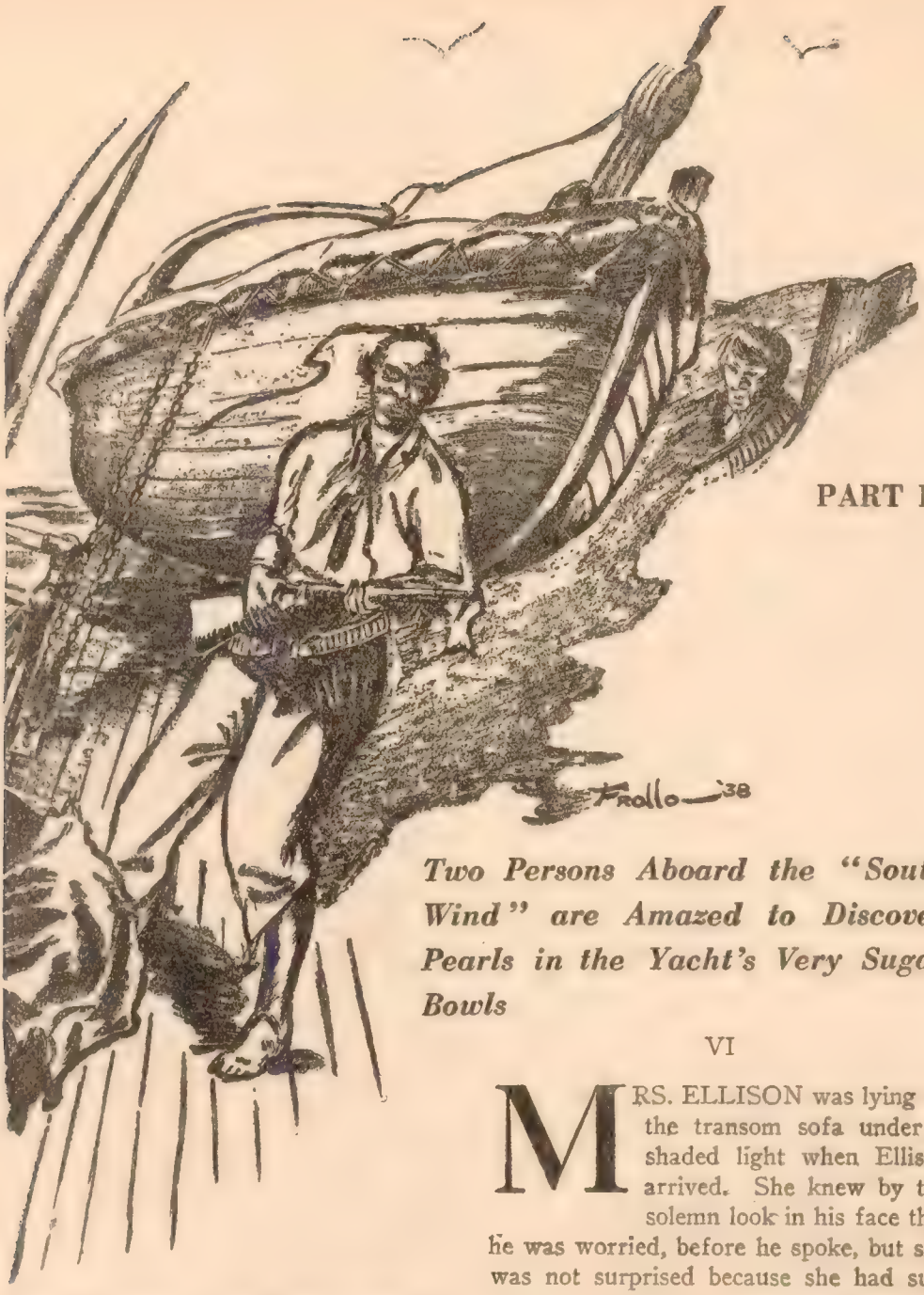
Author of "Guns for China," "Trade Dishes," etc.

SOMETHING ABOUT THE STORY AND WHAT HAS HAPPENED BEFORE

THE Dutch trader Van Klinken declared that "pearls is a looney business," and made that statement even before he knew the various elements that were entering into the pearling trade at Quarter Moon Island.

Van Klinken, from his office in a Chinese port, is interested in the fact that Ellison, an American millionaire, is going to use his yacht, the *South Wind*, in a pearling venture, and because he tries to keep track of any sort of pearling activities in Eastern waters, he arranges for his own man, Captain Sunderland, to go as master of the *South Wind*. And he also sees to it that a girl from his own office goes as companion to Mrs. Ellison on board the yacht. These two are especially interested in Rolf, who has told Ellison about the pearls and whose pal, one





Captain Barron of the *Alantra,* appears to be standing by all the time. Captain Sunderland is also interested in Parkins, the cockney steward of the *South Wind,* who seems to be too much in evidence, as they sail for Quarter Moon Island, their announced destination, Singapore.

PART II

Two Persons Aboard the "South Wind" are Amazed to Discover Pearls in the Yacht's Very Sugar Bowls

VI

MRS. ELLISON was lying on the transom sofa under a shaded light when Ellison arrived. She knew by the solemn look in his face that he was worried, before he spoke, but she was not surprised because she had suspected even before they sailed from San Francisco that the Ellison financial empire was a trifle shaky.

"Ah, my dear! Comfortable, eh? Well, this is the last dust I'll bring aboard from this town for quite a while." He shut the door to the main cabin behind him care-

fully — and dropped the bar hasp into place.

His wife threw her book aside. She was wearing a blue silk dressing gown. Her hair was well shot with white though she was still youthful in appearance. Her black eyes searched her husband's face.

"Get the cable you expected, George?"

"Not here yet. I left Parkins at the cable office. Thought you'd have this woman you've hired read for you. That's a poor light for reading—and motion on the boat from the flood tide." He turned away to open a tiny cabinet and take out a small bottle of liqueur, and a pair of tiny glasses.

Mrs. Ellison sat up. "Just how bad are things, George?"

He shrugged his shoulders, sat in a chair swivelled to the deck, and poured both glasses full of the yellow liquid. "Have a trifle of this with me to get the Chinkie taste out of our mouths. Oh, things are not so bad. Stock in the Excelsior Holding Company has been taking a licking in the market but things will always come back if given time. The boys are on the job, anyhow."

Mrs. Ellison refused to be comforted so easily. She knew that when that white mustache had a bristly appearance that the family fortunes were either at a low ebb or a few more millions were in sight. She was tired of big money and all the worries that went with it. "You promised that on this cruise you'd forget the market."

"I can't forget it, Doris, with everything crashing. I thought the worst was over, but with Excelsior Holding down to forty from two hundred and sixty, twenty-two companies based on Excelsior are in for a licking."

"We're broke now?"

Ellison shrugged his shoulders and grinned. "There's enough left for you and the boys, and we're still yachting." He nodded to her over his tiny glass and they drank.

"I've boiled our eggs over a gas jet and didn't worry much about it. We can do it again and still have a lot of fun, George."

"You won't have to do that. No, I expect the market to come back. In the meantime I intend to be out of reach of the banks and newspapers and—" He stopped and ran a hand over his hair. There was a tremor across his jaws as they hardened into his own peculiar pugnacity.

Mrs. Ellison sat a little straighter and stared at her husband. If it had not been for the pink shades on the lights Ellison could have seen that she lost a trifle of color from her cheeks.

"And what?"

ELLISON shifted uneasily. "Well, technically I'm in a jam. No need to bother about it, but it's the real reason why I want to drop from sight for a couple of months. This pearl game gives me an excuse, but when I get that cable, I want to warn the boys by a code message not to worry if we're reported missing, or overdue at Singapore."

"Ah!" she said. "Then things are really bad, George. When you begin to admit that things are only technically wrong, I know it for a danger signal. Just how bad is it?"

"I don't know, Doris. Bad enough. The boys will worry and they'll be in a bad spot—not themselves, but on account of me. I've borrowed heavily on stocks of the subsidiary companies to try and support the stock of Excelsior. More millions are involved than I want to think about. Not my own, but the money of stock holders. Technically—oh, well, let it slide for now until Parkins brings the cable I'm waiting for."

"Technically, it's illegal?"

Ellison nodded. "Only a matter of bookkeeping. The whole structure is toppling—unless the market turns for the better. It'll be a bit of a scandal for the newspapers until I've time to straighten

out the mess. So that's why I've turned pearler."

"Expect to make a million or two with pearls?"

"No. Might organize a company if that reef is as rich in pearls as Rolf says. I'm only taking a chance that we can pick up a few pearls, but my main object is to be where I can't be found."

"We'll really be hiding then?" She smiled at him.

"Something like that—temporarily. It might not do my affairs at home any harm if the news got out that George Ellison has blundered into a pearl bank that'll produce millions. It wouldn't take many pearls to let such rumors loose on the world. Everybody expects me to fall on my feet. I've done it more than once, haven't I?"

"Certainly you have. I'm not going to worry a bit. It'd be just like you, George, to run into millions of dollars worth of pearls—the old Ellison luck. So stop worrying yourself."

"You're a brick, Doris." He gave her an affectionate glance and filled his own glass. "I'm getting out of here before the local banks find that my drafts are not likely to be honored. I've drawn heavily here and I don't want the yacht grabbed yet. I need it."

MRS. ELLISON leaned back on the lounge. "So we've got to stay at sea until nobody wants to grab the yacht!" She laughed at the idea. It had its ludicrous aspects as an idea. "That'll be a new experience for us! The Ellison yacht taken away from them and they go looking for a job in China!"

Ellison grinned. "Or, Singapore. No, we won't have to stay at sea. We'll be anchored in a sheltered harbor at Quarter Moon. And Rolf says we can fix up an old plantation house on the island. We'll sling hammocks in the palm grove and put up canvas for you and this miss—who is she?"

"Fitch. Clara Fitch. I like her—and that new skipper you got. When we have meals at the cabin table they'll join us. And I suppose that Rolf will be in the party, of course."

"Yes. He's due aboard now. Somehow, I haven't much confidence in his talk, but he's shown me seven valuable pearls. That Dutch appraiser gave them an excellent valuation, and I can't see why Rolf would want to try a swindle on me. His arguments are logical—can't sell those pearls without letting the whole industry know that he's hit something good, and he can't take his own pearling outfit to this secret bank without being followed. The place would be swarming with luggers in a month and they'd clean up the shell before he'd really be fairly started."

"Won't the yacht be followed if he goes with us?"

"Nobody knows he's sailing with us. Anyway, we're bound for Singapore and we just sneak in and hide at Quarter Moon. May be there six months. In that time a Japanese diver that we're taking ought to bring up a lot of pearls—if the pearls are there as thickly as Rolf swears they must be. But we don't have to stay there very long. All we're after is a test of the bank—and then bring a fleet in from Singapore. That'll be the company I organize—if we find enough pearls."

"And if we don't?"

"Then we're no worse off than we were, the market will have time to come back, I can't be pounced upon to make a lot of explanations about financial manipulations, and I'll be rested up to tackle whatever I've got to tackle after we pull out from Quarter Moon."

"Good enough if you stop worrying! And with this Miss Fitch, I'll have company while you mess around with pearls."

"And a little fishing. Rolf says I'll have good sport at—"

There was a gentle tapping at the door. Ellison rose and lifted the bar. It was Parkins.

"Cable, sir." The steward handed it in.

"All right, Parkins. Stand by to send an answer ashore. Seen anything of Mr. Rolf?"

"Not yet, sir. But we've got that sort of Jappy sailor aboard."

"Fine! I'll ring in a few minutes." Ellison took the cable and closed the door.

Tearing open the envelope, Ellison laid it on the little table near his chair, and took from his pocket the private code book he used when dealing with his sons by wire.

The cable read *Clarinette engine faulty speed is indefinite.*

Mrs. Ellison watched with concern while he wrote down the meaning of the words in the message by consulting the code book, until he had before him written on a slip of paper *Excelsior thirty have hope check decline.*

"What's the bad news, George?"

"Pet holding company at thirty—and still taking a licking." He whistled a long note and his face twisted as he set his teeth. He stared at a side light on the bulkhead and then looked about the luxurious owner's quarters of the yacht *South Wind* as if he felt that he had strayed into the place as an intruder.

"Thirty! Excelsior at thirty. From a high of two hundred and sixty. Sounds as if we need a few pearls!"

Ellison laughed harshly and rose. He walked athwart the room, then back. "We may need more than pearls. But you and the boys are safe with enough to take care—"

"We'll throw it into the pot, George."

"It won't be needed. But I'm glad to be getting out in the next few minutes. The crash at home will be here by noon tomorrow when the markets open and every Ellison company is on the skids for the bottom. The newspaper correspondents here won't find me—nor will the bank."

He tore a sheet from a notebook, wrote a few words, and handed the sheet to his wife. "Here's what I'm telling the boys—but I'll code it, of course." Mrs. Ellison read: *"Use your own judgment and liquidate anything to try and support Excelsior.* stop *Do not worry on reports that yacht missing or overdue. We are*

disappearing for sixty days. stop *Singapore or here then will cable We send love."*

Mrs. Ellison smiled and nodded assent. "They'll know that it's best for you to be out of reach of the newspapers. We'll make a lark of this pearling trip and if we're broke when we turn up again—well, we'd be broke anyway and all the excitement will be cooled down. But I doubt that you can go a month, George, without being at the end of a cable—or a stock ticker. Code it and forget it."

SHE resumed her book and Ellison picked from the pocket code the words he needed. Then he sat for some time smoking. He heard the hail from the sampan and a few minutes later Rolf coming aboard. Then Ellison waved a hand to his wife and went to the main cabin.

Parkins came bustling through from forward. "Our guest just over the side, sir," he said.

"Show him down. He'll have baggage. Attend to it. His room ready?"

"Yes, sir. Starboard side there. Everything shipshape."

"And Miss Fitch on the port side here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Captain Sunderland and Miss Fitch will take their meals here, Parkins."

One of the steward's eyebrows quivered slightly. "At second table, sir?"

"With Mrs. Ellison and me and Mr. Rolf—that'll make five for the main cabin mess, unless Mrs. Ellison and I take a meal now and then in our quarters. Will depend on the weather mostly. And you might consider this. Parkins; Miss Finch —or is it Fitch?"

"Fitch, sir. Miss Clara Fitch."

"Miss Fitch is not considered as a servant aboard. She's a companion for Mrs. Ellison when I'm busy with other affairs."

"I understand, sir." The steward's other eyebrow quivered. He paused for an instant, and seeing that nothing more was to be said, moved aft and up the companionway to bring Rolf below.

And Rolf was down in a minute. Parkins slipped away for the bags from the sampan.

Ellison rose and offered his hand. "Welcome aboard, Mr. Rolf. And we're ready to sail if you say so."

"Thank you, sir. I'm all set. Came across the river from the native city in a sampan.

"Better that way. I've suspected for some time that some of the pearling outfits have been keeping a fairly close watch on me. They've a hunch that I'm getting ready for a secret cruise. I've just ordered some extra diving gear ashore and nobody'll believe that I'm getting out until it's delivered." Rolf sat at the other side of the table in a swivel chair and put his cap on the cushioned seats running fore and aft from the stateroom doors off the main cabin.

ELLISON passed a box of cigars. "We'll have a drink presently. Then I'll pass the word to sail, eh? As for any pearlers being likely to follow us, I doubt they'd catch the *South Wind*. We travel when we've got a breath of air and we've plenty of power for calms."

Rolf squinted up at the lights on the bulkheads. "No lugger could catch us, sir, I'm sure. But as nobody knows I'm aboard now, or that I'm to sail with you, there's no danger that we'll have any ship in our wake."

"We're only dropping down the river," said Ellison with a laugh. "Nobody knows we pass the outer sea buoy tonight. And this new skipper, Cap'n Sunderland, is a qualified pilot for the river."

"He's an old-timer around here, I understand."

"Know him?"

"Only by sight. We all get to know one another in a port like this, by sight." Rolf put a match to his cigar. "How did you come to get in touch with this Sunderland, if it's any of my business?"

"Parkins attended to it. Some German or Holland name—man who runs a crew agency about abeam of us on the Bund."

"Van Klinken?"

"That's it. Know anything about him?"

"I've picked up cooks and crew there now and then. He's all right, I suppose. Mostly, smugglers and gun-runners hang out at his place. That's all right. A man has to make a dollar where he can."

Ellison's eyes bored into Rolf, but the pearler was not aware of the keenness of the scrutiny. "Know anything against this Sunderland?"

Rolf shook his head with decision. "Not a thing. He's been on the beach some time waiting for a ship but Van Klinken can't seem to find a suitable command—or couldn't till now. I think that Cap'n Sunderland's a good man. I've thought more than once that I could put him in command of one of my luggers, but that'd be a step-down from the bridge of a big tramp."

"He has excellent papers—clean record. And he lost his last command because it was sold from under him by a bankrupt trampship company." Ellison watched a smoke ring lift toward the skylight.

"Oh, Sunderland's all right. If I had any doubt I'd say to, Mr. Ellison. Especially with Mrs. Ellison along with us."

"We've another young lady—a Miss Fitch—as companion."

"From Van Klinken?"

"Yes. Ever heard of her?"

"Nothing beyond the fact that she works in Van Klinken's office. She's spotting around for jobs to travel—I think that I heard that much."

Parkins came bustling down with bags.

Ellison spoke. "As you go on deck, Parkins, tell the sailing master that we'll get under way when you come back from the cable office. Here's a message to be sent—and you might avoid losing any time ashore."

"Yes, sir." Parkins dropped Rolf's bag in his room, picked up the folded sheet for the cable office, and moved away. When he came down with Rolf's last bag, Mr. Ellison was in his quarters.

"Smoke cigars, Parkins?"

"Yes, sir. Sort of, now and then, when I can afford one."

Rolf held out a cigar that was wrapped with a transparent paper cover. Part of the cigar under it looked yellow. Parkins took it and gave it a glance. The yellow color did not look natural for an expensive cigar. He moved aft a little, out of Rolf's vision as he faced forward in the chair, and took off the transparent paper. He found that the yellow color was caused by the yellow back of a gold bank note—a fifty-dollar note.

"Thank you kindly, sir," said Parkins. "I'll enjoy the smoke later, sir."

"And thank you, Parkins, for all the trouble you've been to on my account. Perhaps you can attend to little matters for me during the cruise which will not interfere with your regular duties."

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir." And Parkins, with a snatch at his cap visor by way of salute, leaped up the companionway and was on deck to tell Captain Sunderland to sail when the cable was delivered ashore and the dinghy back alongside. And as he went ashore with Nels, the steward whistled softly through his teeth, one of his most ribald music hall ballads. Things were going well for Parkins.

VII

SUNDERLAND saw the white-topped cap of Parkins pop up above the hatch of the after companionway. The steward looked forward to where the skipper and Clara Fitch sat under the awnings.

"Look 'ere, sir. Wot's the matter with you and Miss Clara 'avin' your tiffin on deck?"

"Corking idea, Parkins—but it makes extra work for you."

"Go on, sir! No trouble at all. Just a tray, mind, and something coldish. A little style don't do nobody no 'arm."

"Fine, Parkins! I appreciate your consideration for us."

"With the owner and the missus out of the ship and all, it'll be a spot of fun to tiffin like a pair of toffs. Comfort when you can 'ave it cheap, that's my motter."

Parkins went below again, whistling softly one of his gay tunes, and began to order Chin, the cook, to "'hop at it with the skipper's chow and the Number Two missy tea—and plenty of sugar, mind, or the British and the Chinks will be in a blinkin' war that starts right in this yacht, below 'ere—and it'll be a war, too, Chin."

"Allee time talkee—talkee!" exploded Chin. Then came the sound of dishes slapped on a glass-topped tray as Chin and Parkins loaded the tray.

Sunderland grinned at Clara, and whispered, "That steward has some smooth game to play. He's waited on me more than on the owner on the way down here."

"And butter wouldn't melt in his mouth when he looks around for something to do that he thinks will please me," she answered.

The *South Wind*, after a fourteen day passage south, was anchored in a placid reef-shut bay enclosed by the jungled hills of Quarter Moon Island. The yacht

had been there for a week. Mrs. Ellison was out in the power boat with Ellison, Rolf, Anderson as engineer of the boat, and Suki. The Japanese was bringing up shell from various positions, bearings taken on each dive, and the shell left on the reef to rot.

The four men of the crew were ashore in the plantation house. They had cut the rank vegetation away from the verandahs and hammocks were slung. Canvas shelters and hammocks were up in the palm grove, and there Clara read books to Mrs. Ellison during the heat of the days. A rickety ruin of an old bamboo pier had been improved to make landings easy. The yacht was only three hundred yards from the pier head.

It was four miles to the reefs that overlapped and shut in the bay. The water was mostly like a mirror of blue with colorful gardens only a few fathoms down to the bottom, with rainbow colored fish moving through the coral and sand and waving submarine foliage.

The whiteness of the nearby beaches was almost blinding under midday sun. Coconut trees rimmed the inner curves of the bay, but many wild palms had grown since the copra plantation had been abandoned.

Hurricanes had broken the tops from many of the older trees.

"No wonder you want to go pearl hunting, if this is the scenery you live in," said Clara.

"Now you've got the idea, gal! Only it's pretty hot when you've got to run a galley fire in a place like this."

She made a little face at him. "Just the samey, this is worth all the thumping I did on typewriters—and I'd rather cook in a place of such beauty than be in a New York office."

"You're a born rover. But don't let this beauty fool you. Look at the tree stumps. I've two anchors out—and double cables—with a hawser ready to bend on a spare anchor. This place has teeth, but you see them only on a low barometer."

PARKINS came up with the tray. His cap was a trifle askew on his head and the silver buttons of his white jacket let it flop open. Under the jacket he wore only a sketchy cotton shirt. By such means the steward demonstrated the fact that no discipline was needed among equals, with the boss absent.

"Just a bit of tea, some nice tinned meat, a spot of the most expensive Russian caviare, and tinned biscuits that make you think of Fuller's in London. And if you don't mind, sir, I'll 'op it now, and 'ave a go at my own tea." Then he added in a hoarse whisper, a guarding hand to the side of his mouth, "That tea cost twenty-six shillin' the pound. I knows, I bought it for the owner. Picked special for mandarins with pig tails and rooster feathers in their 'ats. Nobody'll know the diff—I bought enough to last a year and I 'opes you'll like it as well as I do."

"Now, now, Parkins!" objected Sunderland. "I don't like this idea of breaking out the owner's private stores when he's not in the ship."

The steward looked hurt. Both eyebrows quivered and Parkins stiffened his shoulders to show respect. "If you'll allow me to say it, sir, my h'orders from the owner hisself was that nothing in the ship was too good for you and Miss Clara. Mr. Ellison made it distinct to me that you two are not to be regarded as servants, and treated according to that. I 'opes that I makes myself clear, sir."

"That's something I didn't know, Parkins. I appreciate your attitude—and it's mighty good of you to give us this special service on a hot day like this."

"Very good, sir. No offense meant and I'm glad to 'ear our new skipper regards the owner's interest and I'm 'appy to be in the ship, sir. Will that be all, sir?"

"Go get your tea, Parkins—and thank you."

"And my thanks, too, Parkins," said Clara.

The steward bowed slightly and went below.

Sunderland looked at Clara—and she winked. "What's this all about?" she whispered.

"We're being tested—to get into the game against the Ellisons. Maybe I pulled a boner to hint that I object to private stores for our tiffin. Parkins knows now that I'm not quite safe for any argument that Ellison can be swindled to my profit."

CLARA reached for one of the small sugar bowls and took off the cover. The bowl was empty—and so was the tiny bowl beside Sunderland's plate.

"Hey, Parkins! No sugar!" Sunderland called down the 'midship skylight just abaft the galley.

The steward ran up, capless and coatless. He looked into the bowls. "My mistake, sir. Told the Chinkie that I'd put soft sugar in so 'e didn't load the bowls with lumps." He went away with the empty bowls.

"Those bowls were full of loaf sugar at breakfast," whispered Sunderland. "And I was last at breakfast. Why should he shift to soft sugar?"

"The bowls may have been washed and left empty," said Clara.

Sunderland shook his head. "There's a game on."

"You don't believe—that he'd put something in soft sugar?" There was a hint of alarm in Clara's eyes as she stared at Sunderland.

"Nothing like that. But I find that there's a reason for every silly thing that Parkins says or does. He's a smooth customer."

Clara held up a warning hand. The steward was starting up the companionway from the main cabin by the sound of his feet on the lower steps.

The bowls were put before them. One would have held plenty of sugar for the tiffin tea.

"'Ere you are! Everything proper and shipshape. Might as well swank it a bit while we've the chance. Just ring, sir, if anything more's wanted." Parkins moved away.

Sunderland had taken a bit of soft sugar on a spoon and tasted carefully. "Just a minute, Parkins!" Sunderland put handkerchief to his tongue.

"Yes, sir!"

"I think that somebody has made a mistake—Chin, perhaps."

"Wot's wrong, sir?"

"My bowl is not full of sugar."

Parkins stared in astonishment with frank disbelief. "Beg pardon, sir! Did I hear correctly?"

Sunderland dipped the spoon into his bowl and held the spoon toward the steward, a white substance on the spoon's tip. "Taste this and tell me what you think is wrong."

Parkins took the spoon without hesitation and tasted. "That's sugar, right enough, sir!" He looked in puzzled wonder at the skipper.

"Try the other bowl," commanded Sunderland.

Parkins obeyed. "That's sugar, too, sir."

"All right—perhaps I'm wrong. That'll be all, Parkins."

"Thank you kindly, sir." Parkins sniffed and remained rigidly where he stood. "But look 'ere, Skipper! I don't like this sort of thing, not by arf!"

"Don't like what?" Sunderland was curt.

"I gives you two a treat when the own-

er's out of the ship. And wot do I get? You acts like you blinkin' well thort I was puttin' something wrong in your tea sugar. Not me, sir! I'm a seaman, along with bein' a steward, and you can eat anything I puts before you."

"All right," said Sunderland with a grin. "Just a little joke of mine."

"I thort you two was friends of mine." Parkins turned and left abruptly. They heard him pass through the main cabin, the passage in the engine room, into the galley, and to the crew's messroom. He banged dishes about—then burst into laughter.

"He knew what I meant when I made him taste the sugar in both bowls," said Sunderland.

CLARA poured both cups full of tea. "I don't like this hidden game of Parkins," she said. "It worries me."

"Don't you worry. He'll try no games on me—and get away with 'em, so there's no need—" Sunderland broke off abruptly to stare at Clara in astonishment.

"What in heaven's name does this mean?" she asked in amazement. Her hand with the spoon from the sugar bowl was frozen halfway between bowl and cup and she was gazing with startled eyes at what was on the spoon with sugar.

"What the dickens!" exclaimed Sunderland in guarded tones as he stared himself, dumbfounded and incredulous of what he saw himself in the spoon held up by Clara.

From the sugar levelled off in the spoon there rose the pinkish rounded dome of a half sphere. The under half was hidden in the sugar. But the upper half scintillated in a peculiar way in contrast with the dead ivory whiteness of the sugar base—pinkish tints that seemed alive as they reflected the dazzle of the sunlit water out beyond the yacht's awnings.

"Let me see it, please!" Sunderland thrust forward a hand, palm upward. Clara dumped the spoon into his hand. The sugar flattened out and the half sphere became whole, glowing in its nest of white grains in Sunderland's cupped hand.

"Isn't that a pearl!" gasped Clara.

"Nothing but, gal! Worth about five hundred dollars!"

"But—why in the sugar?"

"They're so thick around here that we're likely to find 'em in anything." Sunderland, still astonished, turned the pearl over and over in his hand, and twisted his lips for a whistle that did not pass his lips.

"They're thick around Parkins, sure enough."

Sunderland set the pearl in his saucer, picked up the bowl from which Clara had spooned the sugar, and dumped the contents into his plate. No more pearls. He scooped the sugar up hastily and put it back in the bowl.

But with his own sugar bowl he had luck. The dumped sugar produced a pearl that was so nearly like the first that they might have been purposely matched for a perfect pair.

"One for each of us," said Sunderland quietly. "Now I begin to see through the game."

"Uh huh! I begin to get a glimmer myself. A sweet little bribe for both of us so we'll see nothing and say nothing about whatever it is that's going on."

Sunderland nodded. "Something like that—and these pearls never came from the shell rotting on the beach, I'd say."

"Think that Rolf put Parkins up to this game?"

"Maybe." Sunderland slipped both pearls into a pocket. "I'll have to try a little game of my own."

"Going to give the pearls to Mr. Ellison?"

"And get myself caught in what looks like crookedness? No. That may be the purpose of this little drama in sugar bowls. I'd be under suspicion, and except for you as a witness as to where they came

from, I'd be in a jam trying to say that Parkins served pearls with sugar."

"Nobody would believe it."

"Exactly! I'd sound like a liar—which is just what Rolf may want done so I'll be crippled in any attempt to tell truth—if I get any—to Ellison." Sunderland, like Clara, was talking only in tones that did not carry beyond the deck seat which held them and the tray between them.

"But if you're charged with having stolen pearls—and they're found on you—you'll be in a bigger jam still."

SUNDERLAND rose. He picked up both delicate bowls, leaving their covers on the tray. He tossed both bowls overboard, sugar and all.

"Boy! Those are expensive China, and belong in Mrs. Ellison's pet set in the ship—with the owner's flag on them."

"I know it. Terrible accident." Sunderland pressed the nearby button that rang a bell below in the galley.

Parkins was on deck in an instant through the forward hatchway to the crew quarters. There was a smirky smile on his lips as he looked aft to Sunderland. "You rang, sir?"

"Yes, Parkins. I wish you'd fetch some loaf sugar."

Parkins lost his grin. "Wot's wrong with the soft sugar, if I'd be allowed to ask, sir?"

"The soft sugar's all right—only we haven't any."

"Wot! Gorn already—the lot of it?"

Clara spoke up, her voice full of silk. "My fault, Parkins. I intended to go below to get loaf sugar, stepped too near the rail, and both bowls slipped from my fingers—and went overboard."

Parkins came up on deck to stare at the tray. He sucked his teeth in amazed hisses. "My sister's Christian aunt! Not overboard!"

"Look over the side—to starboard," said Sunderland.

Parkins stepped to the rails that were always up when at anchor or in port. He stared through the clear water to the sandy bottom. He saw the cup-size bowls thirty feet below the surface. "A nice fix for me! Them bowls is special good—and the missus'll 'ave my 'air off!"

"Suki can dive for them," said Sunderland. "You need not say a word about this. I'll attend to it myself. If you talk too much about losing those bowls overboard you might get into a lot of trouble Parkins."

The steward turned and gave Sunderland a quizzical glance. The mobile eyebrows quivered. Parkins allowed himself a knowing grin. "I suppose you're right, sir."

"You'd be surprised to find out just how right I am, Parkins, if this business isn't handled with gloves."

"I think I understand, sir."

"I'm not sure that you do. So far, we've seen no pearls at Quarter Moon because Suki hasn't found any that I know of—or has he?"

"I've 'eard of no pearls, sir, that the Jappy brought up. The shells are out on the reef, rottin' like, ain't they?"

"They are. But as I said, I've seen no pearls."

Parkins quivered one eyebrow. Then his ears wriggled. "I'll take the skipper's word for that, sir." He spoke with frank satisfaction.

"Then I'm glad I've made myself clear. Now, if you'd just fetch some loaf sugar we'll go on with tiffin, and the less said the better."

"Very good, sir. And if I might presume to say it, I'm sure that I understand. And I might add, in a manner of speakin', that wot folks don't know don't do 'em no 'arm. It's a sort of motter of mine sir."

"And a very good motto, Parkins." Sunderland sat. Parkins went below, brought up the loaf sugar, sniffed twice, wriggled his ears and got off the deck.

Clara Fitch allowed herself the luxury

of a giggle. "You rogue! Now Parkins can't be sure that you've seen any pearls, that you've got any pearls—and he's all puzzled up, as Van Klinken would say."

Sunderland tossed overboard the cool tea and held his cup forward for the pot to be poured by Clara. "You're quite right, Clara, mine dear, as Van Klinken also says. But I think I've established this with Parkins—he's sure that I've pocketed the pearls and that I'm open to get more of them if they're delivered. Also, he feels that you've got your pearl—and we're his pie when it comes to putting a game over on the owner. I may be all wrong, but two lumps, please."

Parkins was in good humor, for from the crew hatch there came the lilting chorus of the music hall ballad which demanded knowledge as to why the world is so gay today.

VIII

SUKI recovered the sugar bowls easily enough before dark. The little Japanese did the job under Parkins' orders. Sunderland, who watched the performance, noted that Suki hunted the bottom when he was down on it for more than bowls. So Parkins had considered the possibility that the two pearls went overside with the bowls; he could not swear that Sunderland had them.

It was the next day that Parkins resumed his devious game. As it was Sunday there was no diving. The crew loafed on the veranda of the plantation house—Nels, Eddie, Chris and a man known as Topsail Pete. Suki went pigeon shooting with a shotgun up a barren gulley. Parkins began to fidget about after tiffin, going ashore and coming back with the power dinghy as if he were engaged in running a Thames ferry.

Sunderland knew that the steward had something covert on his mind, because all morning there had been a sly snicker on his lips and his eyes held hidden insolence as he moved about the yacht. Also, he whistled tunes in an undertone whenever he was near the skipper.

Ellison and Rolf sat under the awning at the stern. Mrs. Ellison and Clara Fitch were ashore under the canvas fly in hammocks, but were not visible from the *South Wind's* deck because a piece of old jib had been hanging by the hammocks as shelter against the morning sun.

Sunderland went below to his room. He could watch Parkins to better advantage from a port hole. There were a few minutes while the skipper talked with Anderson in the engine room. The power dinghy was at the float at the end of the old pier—a landing float built of coconut-tree boles and bamboo flooring. Sunderland heard the dinghy's engine start. He thought that Parkins was returning to the yacht. But instead of coming closer, the low hum of the engine and the thresh of the propeller, receded.

Sunderland went back to his room and looked through the port. The dinghy had its canvas hood over the cockpit and was moving at slow speed, headed for the reefs at the entrance of the bay, about four miles distant.

It was against orders for any of the crew to use the power dinghy alone except for trips ashore or back to the yacht. But as Mrs. Ellison had said something to Clara in the morning about a trip around the bay, Sunderland assumed that the two women were out for a spin, taking the steward as engineer.

Not aware of what the departure of the dinghy really meant, Sunderland took a nap. When he arrived on deck two hours later he was astounded to discover Mrs. Ellison and Clara walking on the beach. The power dinghy, with Parkins in it, was easily picked up with glasses, coming in from the reefs.

"Damn that slick steward!" Sunderland growled under his breath. "He put it over on me that time! He heard Rolf say that the oysters out there would be

searched for pearls tomorrow—and Parkins has beaten him to it! Or has he?"

Ellison and Rolf were still on the stern in folding chairs, going over charts of the waters about the island. Sunderland kept away from them. He saw the dinghy heading for the anchorage and he was

set to put Parkins over the jumps for breaking orders by taking the power dinghy away alone.

The steward surged up to the outer end of the boat boom, reversed the propeller, and stopped. It was apparent to Sunderland that Parkins expected trouble. His face was flushed and dripping sweat as he secured the painter to the boom head, with a boat hook drew the rowing dinghy toward him, used it as a bridge to the yacht's gangway, and pulled himself up by the grab ropes. His cap was over one ear, his feet were wet and oozed sand, and as he faced Sunderland, the steward looked aft and held up a cautioning hand.

SUNDERLAND did not want to make a row that would disturb Ellison. So he asked quietly, but with a bite in the guarded words, "What the hell is this? A little private pearl hunting?"

"Easy does it, Skipper!" warned Parkins in a hoarse whisper.

"You know my orders about cruising with the dinghy without permission."

Parkins wiped his face with a silk handkerchief bordered by the flags of all nations—a red handkerchief big enough for a table cover.

"Blast the crimson dinghy! I'm fair gravelled by wot I sawr!"

"Oh, are you? Wait till I'm done and—"

"I ain't got nothing to 'ide," broke in Parkins. "This is a matter between me and the owner, beggin' your pardon about the private cruise I just made."

"I won't have you break my orders and go direct to the owner. What's your idea of sneaking away—to the reef—with that dinghy?"

"Ow, don't make a fuss! You come along with me to the owner and let me 'ave my say! Then make your row about the ruddy dinghy and all—if you want. I know wot I'm doin' of, h'orders or no h'orders."

"All right. We'll take it up with Mr. Ellison. Come along aft."

Parkins followed to the after awning.

"Mr. Ellison, I'm sorry to disturb you, but the steward took the dinghy away to the reef against orders—and wants to make a report direct to you."

"Reef!" said Ellison. He pushed his cap to the back of his head and stared at the skipper, then at Parkins. "Been to the reef!"

Rolf's face hardened. His eyes closed a trifle and turned to Parkins. His cheeks flushed with anger, then the lines in them came out as his teeth shut hard. His lips moved slightly, as if he cursed the steward with mental words which he did not dare utter.

He leaned forward in his chair a little, jaw thrust out.

"Yes, sir," said Parkins. "I know I've disobeyed orders. I 'ad my own reasons. I'll stand the gaff for it, but wot I done was to find out if I knowed whot I was talkin' about before I talked."

Ellison frowned. "What are you driving at, Parkins?"

"If I didn't do wot I just done, somebody else might 'ave gone and done it. I don't bear no tales and I mentions no names, but I knows whot I knows."

Parkins gulped and his chin jerked forward.

"Tales? Names? What's this? Don't evade?" Ellison's white mustache became a horizontal line athwart his upper lip.

"I picked up a word or two among the crew ashore, sir. Not that I was listenin', as you might say, sir. It near floored me. But I ain't namin' no names. That ain't my style, sir."

"Oh, damn your style!" flared Ellison. "Get to it!"

Parkins cleared his throat. "That matter in 'and, sir, takes a bit of caution, if I'm allowed to decide, sir, and that's wot I'm doin' and done from the time I pinched the dinghy. It's nothin' much to put it one way, and quite a lot if put another way."

"Go on!" barked Ellison impatiently. Rolf swore under his breath.

"There's a man or so that's got the wind up about this pearlin' business."

"Who are they"

"I ain't namin' no names, skipper, owner, nor nobody else. I sticks to that, beggin' your pardon, if I'm put in h'irons."

"Then you mean that the men have been talking about our pearling? What if they have?"

"It might be more'n tolk. I'm sharp, if I do say so. Not a matter to bother you about till I knows wot I'm sayin'. And I can't say wot they said when they whispered."

"And you go to the reef because you heard somebody whispering! That it? And now you want an alibi for breaking orders from the skipper and pull this mystery to justify your action. I won't let you get away with that, Parkins."

"No, sir. But it's this way. The men stopped talkin' and whispered when I was about ashore. So I figgers it out that wot somebody intends to do this very night is go out and 'ave a look for pearls on their own 'ook."

"Oh!" said Ellison. "That's it! Go on!"

"So I says to myself, I'll keep my nap, and go 'ave a look in daylight. That'll give 'em a 'int that I'll take things in my own 'ands. So I goes and takes a look at some of the shell. It was all open'anded in the light of day, and nobody bothered to call me back, and—"

"I thought you had Mrs. Ellison and Miss Fitch out for a ride," broke in Sunderland. "No reason to call you back in that case."

ELLISON gave Sunderland a nod of understanding.

"Night, you know, sir, the men could walk down the beach to the reef and 'ave a look for pearls on their own. That'd be a lot worse, I says to myself, than me goin' in the broad of day with the dinghy. And for all we knows, the men—some of 'em or one of 'em maybe—'ave gone and made a job of lookin' for pearls by night before this."

"See any signs of anybody tampering with the shell?" asked Rolf, with a nod to Ellison for pardon at asking the question.

"No, sir, not that I'd know. Things are a bit strong out on that reef in the 'eat of day, if you understands." Parkins turned again to Ellison and went on. "But I goes through with the job of work I set myself to, sir."

"Looked for pearls, eh?"

Parkins gulped. "Yes, sir."

"Find any?" Ellison's anger had softened. He knew just how ridiculous Parkins could make himself when he wanted to be dramatic and wriggle out of a tight place when he was caught at some petty disobedience of orders.

The steward thrust a hand into a side coat pocket. His fist came out closed, he opened his fingers with the palm up, and three astonished men stared at two beautiful pearls.

"Damn me!" exclaimed Rolf. Then he managed to turn his anger to satisfaction. "Mr. Ellison, there you are! A pair of

excellent samples of what we can expect from the waters we're working!"

Ellison leaned forward to peer at the pearls. Then he plucked them from the steward's hands.

Sunderland glanced at Rolf. There was a livid whiteness in the pearler's face, the fire of rage in his eyes, and he seemed to be holding his breath.

ELLISON put on his glasses. He handed one pearl to Rolf.

"Rolf, this really looks good," said Ellison. "Frankly, it does look as if we're on something as rich as you represented." He turned to Parkins. "I'll overlook the dinghy matter. I'll take up this talk among the crew business later."

"Thank you, sir. Them are valuable pearls, me sayin' it that don't know much about pearls. I says to myself when I seen 'em, 'ere's something worth while, so I comes back as quick as I can. I done wrong to take the dinghy, sir, and I apologizes."

"How many dead oysters did you go through to get two pearls?" demanded Rolf.

"I didn't dig into any oysters, sir. Some of the oldest was shrinked up. In an open shell I sees a spot of pink—like you'd find a bit of colored glarss on a sandy beach, you might say. So I 'ooks it out. It's one of them there."

"Find the other the same way?"

"Yes, sir. Just walks about on the look, like at a blinkin' fair in the country. Didn't touch nothing till I finds the other. I says to myself, lucky the crew—some of 'em or one of 'em, that is, didn't see 'em first. It scares me like, to walk about like that, so when I've got two, I chucks it and 'ooks back 'ere—and there you are."

"If the crew went looking for pearls at night they'd need lights," said Rolf. "They'd risk being seen from the yacht."

"Most doubtless, sir. But they'd look sharp that we didn't see no light."

Rolf gave a twisted grin. "If you went yourself by night you'd be careful to show a light?"

"I'd make sure of that, sir, if I—" Parkins checked himself and gulped. "But I wouldn't do that sort of thing, sir."

"Haven't been away from the yacht by night? Down the beach?"

"No, sir—not me."

"Think anybody else has?" persisted Rolf.

"I couldn't be swearin' at that, sir." Parkins took on again his air of deep mystery with a little modesty—and caution—in it. He seemed to understand that there was a trap concealed in Rolf's questions, but the steward had not been able to see the secret springs of that trap yet. But he sensed the fact that he was getting into deep water with Rolf—and that Rolf was really hostile under his suavity.

"This pearl I've got," said Ellison, "is almost as good as those appraised for you by Van Zee—those seven you showed me back in port."

"Very nearly, sir," said Rolf. "Notice the same fine orient."

"Picked out of two oysters," said Ellison.

"We mustn't expect too much," cautioned Rolf. "Part of a bank of shell may run a high percentage and the balance of the bank be no good whatever. Tricky game, pearling."

"That'll be all, Parkins," said Ellison. He gave Sunderland a sly wink, as to hint that it would be better to drop the matter of the dinghy now that things had turned out so well.

"Very good, sir." The steward touched his cap and turned. He went forward abruptly and disappeared down the crew hatch.

SUNDERLAND went up forward to do a little thinking. He was tempted to tell Ellison privately about the pearls in the sugar. Parkins had not been to

the reef before he spiked the bowls with a pair of pearls as good as those he claimed to have brought from the reef. The dinghy cruise, of course, was all smoke.

Only Parkins himself knew what the fire was that caused the smoke. That was the steward's little game. Sunderland was also certain that Rolf was not the instigator of the dinghy trip.

"No, Rolf is jumping mad. He knows that the steward has put something over. But Rolf has to keep his mouth shut because the game that Parkins has played with Ellison backs up Rolf's claim that we're in rich pearling waters." As he reasoned about the matter, Sunderland had to grin. The steward was leading aces—and probably had a loaded deck up his sleeve.

The steward's hint that others in the crew intended to steal pearls was more smoke, Sunderland felt sure. But what if Parkins had found more than two pearls, turned over a pair to clear himself from the suspicion of theft, and kept a small fortune to himself? That was a point to be considered. Sunderland discarded the idea. He knew perfectly well that Parkins had never found one pearl, much less two, on the reef. And Sunderland had two pearls in his own pocket. The steward certainly was good at finding pearls.

Then Rolf, leaving Ellison under the stern awning, went below. Sunderland listened. The pearler was moving about in his room, and from the sounds that reached Sunderland's ears, the pearler was rummaging about among his effects. He opened the tiny drawers of the bulkhead desk. Bags were unstrapped and strapped again.

Sunderland's shoulders shook with restrained laughter. "Rolf seems to have misplaced something," the skipper told himself. "I wonder if he's going to find it—and if he doesn't, just what kind of a row he'll make. Tricky sort of a man—but Parkins can show him a thing or two when it comes to playing tricks."

Rolf was not at table in the main cabin for the meal before sundown. The pearler had taken a wrapped lunch and gone ashore for a walk along the beach. He went in the direction of the reefs and Sunderland knew that he took with him a pair of automatic pistols.

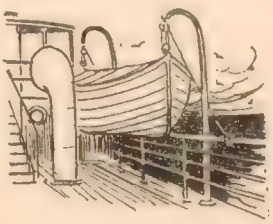
IX

"PASS the word for Parkins to come on deck." It was early in the evening when Sunderland gave the order from the darkness under the awnings. Rolf had returned from his walk ashore.

The bay was starlit with the moon soon to rise. Sunderland and Clara Fitch were in the gloom of the 'midship shelter canvas. She had been told of the two new pearls brought aboard by the steward.

Parkins appeared on deck, a dark shadow sharply outlined against the bright water overside. "You was wantin' me for somethin', sir?"

"My orders are that you take the power dinghy and go to the reef. It seems that the pearls are to be watched. Get on your working clothes and away with the dinghy when I pass the word. You like cruising about the bay hunting for pearls, and you are good at it. So don't blame me for the extra work."



"Nels is the ship's launchman, sir."

"I told you that we need a pearl finder for this job. And you'll take Mr. Rolf along as your passenger."

Parkins hissed through his teeth. He knew that he was in a tough spot of his own making. He turned and stared out

over the bay for a minute. Then, "Very good, sir." He went below and sneaked from the arms chest an automatic pistol and a couple of ammunition clips. He had his own private—or, rather—secret key to the arms.

Without a word Parkins then turned over the engine of the power dinghy. Rolf came up and got aboard. The dinghy roared away reefward. The men playing cards on the plantation house verandah under a hanging lantern stopped their game to run toward the beach and look after the dinghy.

Rolf sat in the stern sheets under the canopy.

He steered while Parkins looked after the engine. And when within half a mile of the reef opening, Rolf swung the tiller and turned the boat to the left into placid water behind the enclosing sickle of the rocky reef that shut out the sea from that side of the bay.

"I thought we was goin' to the reef, sir."

"Slow down," was Rolf's curt order. He kept on toward the wild palm trees along the curving beach, away from the white spume that flashed in the starlight to starboard and to seaward.

Parkins slowed the engine to half speed. A hundred yards from the beach, Rolf called for a stop. Parkins shut off and the dinghy kept on but slowing steadily. They were near the narrowest part of the island where it could be crossed easily in gullies about half a mile long between bits of jungle on higher ground.

"Wot're we 'ere for?" asked Parkins.

"We watch here to see that none of the crew comes looking for pearls. I expect to get a few pearls myself." Rolf leaned back in his seat and put his hands into his coat pockets with his pistols.

"The shell are on the reef, sir."

"I'm not going to the reef to get pearls."

"Not, sir? But you just said you expected to get pearls yourself. This ain't lookin' for 'em, is it?"

"I'll get 'em here—or there'll be trouble."

The steward sniffed nervously. He struck a match and lit a cigarette. His thin face looked haggard in the light from the flame of the match. He tossed the match overboard, puffed, and the red end of the cigarette quivered in the darkness as he crouched down beside the engine and faced aft toward Rolf.

"Who's goin' to 'ave trouble?" demanded Parkins. "Don't you go make none for me, sir."

"I want eight pearls."

"Ow, do you? Wot's that got to do with me?"

"You've got 'em."

PARKINS snickered. "Wot's this? Guest in the ship turns forchin-teller? Wot a dream you must've 'ad, sir, to fetch me out 'ere to talk about me 'avin' eight pearls!"

"You found no pearls among the oysters on the reef."

"No! Why not? And if not, it strikes me that you 'ad a fair chance to say as much to Mr. Ellison when I give 'im two pearls not so long ago, if you'll be so kind as to let me say so."

"You fooled Ellison—but not me."

"Don't you want Mr. Ellison to know about pearls that're picked up, careless like, amongst the shell on the reef that Suki brought up out of the crimson ocean?"

"Never you mind what I want Mr. Ellison to know—I want eight pearls."

Parkins snickered into the gloom and took a long pull on the cigarette, turning the end red as if showing a danger signal to Rolf.

"Where'd I get eight pearls? That's a lot of pearls, mister, for a poor steward bloke like me to have about 'im."

"You got ten pearls."

"Ow, did I? That'll be news for Mr. Ellison, won't it? I got ten, eh? And give 'im two! My word! Wot a row 'e'd make

if 'e knew I kept eight all to myself out of ten—which is your figger on wot I got—and you seems to know, sir. I wouldn't want to be disputin' a guest in the yacht. And it ain't my nature to argue about pearls nor anything else. Just a 'abit of mine, sir."

"I had ten pearls in a belt," said Rolf with what seemed to be weariness in his tone. "I wear that belt most of the time. I locked my door last night but put belt and pearls in a dressing cabinet. That belt was locked up yesterday for a couple of hours in the morning. I looked in on it last night, but didn't pick it up or check on the pearls. So I assumed it was all right today—until you gave pearls to Ellison.

"Then I found all my pearls missing from the belt. What do you make of it?"

"I'd say that somebody's got a key to the door and a key to the dressin' cabinet in your ruddy room in the crimson ship—and I ain't got no brains to speak of, sir."

"Those were my pearls that you gave to Ellison."

"Why didn't you say so at the time, sir?"

"You think you've got me cornered, Parkins. It suits my purpose to have Ellison think that the pearls were found by you in the shell on the reef."

"No, sir, I ain't got nobody cornered. But it jolly well looks to me like if there's any cornerin', you was the one that done it, beggin' your pardon, sir, for givin' my opinion on the subject."

"You feel pretty sure that I'll keep my mouth shut to Ellison."

"You'll be in one 'ell of a mess if you don't."

"I'll admit that, Parkins—but I'm not sure that your trick will work any longer than I want it to work."

"It ought to work, sir. And it 'as, so far. And who's goin' to stop it workin' I'm 'ere to arsk, sir?"

"You'll give me back those eight pearls. I'll get the other two from Ellison—or let him keep 'em."

"Let 'im keep 'em would be better, if you don't mind my puttin' my British nose into your business. And the reason I says that is that Mr. Ellison would be fair floored to find out that we're lookin' for pearls in shell—but that the pearls we find was brung 'ere by you to put in the h'oysters that the Jappy brings out of the bally ocean."

"You're going to keep my pearls?"

"I am, sir—dead or alive."

ROLF laughed softly. His voice had slowly lost its sharp edge. "Listen, Parkins, you're on the wrong track. You can't hold me up. I'm a pearler. I always have pearls with me. And so far, the only person who has told Mr. Ellison that pearls came from the reef shell, is you—not me."

"Granted, sir! Wot next?"

Rolf lifted his right hand from the pocket. Parkins could see the outline of a gun as it swung to point toward him. "This is next. Come across with my pearls."

Parkins snickered. "The pearls are aboard the yacht, sir. All wrapped up nice like they was in a parcel for a customer and a letter that tells 'ow I come by 'em, all alone by myself, private like. And wot's more," added the steward calmly as he lifted his own right hand into the starlit gloom, "I've a gun myself, sir, I was in the service durin' the war. I'm a good shooter." His pistol fell to a knee, the muzzle of the weapon toward Rolf and visible on the bleached fabric of dungaree trousers.

Rolf lowered his gun. "All right, Parkins. I'm not ready yet for the showdown. I'll attend to it aboard the yacht, anyway, when I want my eight pearls."

"There ain't eight, sir."

"You got ten—and gave two to Ellison."

"Skipper has one, Miss Fitch 'olds

't'other. Leastwise, between 'em, they got two. If you don't believe me, go back aboard and take up the matter with Cap'n Sunderland. Maybe you'd like to shoot 'im, too, sir. I'd like to put my nose into that and be bold enough to ask if you think it'd be 'ealthy for you to shoot 'im."

"So Sunderland's in it, eh? And the young woman."

"Right you are, sir."

"Know where they came from?"

"No, sir. I'll let you tell 'em that."

"How'd you explain to Sunderland where you got pearls?"

"I didn't explain. I just served sugar to Sunderland and Miss Clara at tiffin yesterday."

"Then Sunderland knew all the time when you gave those pearls to Ellison that they didn't come from shell on the reef."

"I'd say that the skipper 'ad 'is own ideas. Wot them was, I didn't arsk."

"What'd you give pearls to Sunderland and Miss Fitch for?"

"I just thought it would be smart-like to pass 'em around. It ain't my nature just to 'ave my own fingers in a pie. First off, it'll be 'ard goin' for you to get 'em back from skipper and the young lady. In a game like this, the more in it, the safer. It's a sort o' motter of mine."

"Big-hearted steward, and all that."

"Yes, sir. I can't 'elp it if that's my nature, can I?"

"Think you'll keep the balance of the pearls for yourself?"

"I might. It'll take a little thinkin' over. There's one thing against the idea of keepin' 'em *all* for myself."

"Indeed! And what's that?"

"I shouldn't like to see Mr. Ellison disappointed on this trip lookin' for pearls by not findin' any in the shell that Suki brings up.

"Likewise, it'd give your reputation for truth a bad name, to 'ave no pearls found after all you've said on the subject. Now, don't you feel the same way, sir?"

"I suppose it would be a good idea to let the affair ride that way for the present."

"That makes everybody 'appy, sir."

"If they stay happy, that'll be fine. Just now I've other matters on my mind that're more important. Start your engine."

"Back to the yacht now, sir?"

"Run me up to the beach. I'll stay there a while and watch to make sure that nobody comes pearling from the plantation house."

"Very good, sir." Parkins started his engine and Rolf steered for the shingle. Presently the stem foot grated on coral dust.

ROLF moved forward on the side of the dinghy that put the engine between him and Parkins. "You wait for me on the other side of the bay out here. There's a bight similar to this over there. When the moon rises you'll be in shadow. Stay there and watch the reef until I whistle for you. I'll be ready to go back to the yacht in a couple of hours or more." Rolf jumped ashore and the head of the dinghy, free of his weight, lifted and was adrift.

"I wouldn't put it past Suki to come this way for a bit of a walk, sir. Mind your eye."

"The moon'll be up soon. But why do you think the Jap wants to come pearling on his own account?"

"No special reason. But 'e's a Jappy, and them ones are smartlike, and you never knows wot's in their minds. Full o' tricks. Not like us white folks at all." Parkins snickered.

"I'd like to catch him pearling."

"You might not like it at all, sir. 'Andy, with a knife, that Jappy."

Rolf froze in his tracks. "What do you know about Suki—and his handiness with knives?"

"I don't know nothing about it, sir."

"Then what're you talking about?"

"The Jappy—and knives."

"Listen here, Parkins—you're driving

at something! What's on your mind about Suki?"

"Nothing special, sir—I just got a faint idea that I seen that Jappy before, sir."

"Saw him where?"

"I ain't sure, sir. The best I can make of it is that in the back of my mind it seems to me that I seen that Jappy at the Blue 'Eron Bridge."

"Is that so? But not with a knife."

"No, sir, I don't think so—not with a knife. Not Suki."

"Then what made you talk about how handy he is with a knife?"

"Sort of an idea that I wouldn't like to see you 'urt. Of course, Jappies don't eat with their knives—they eats with a couple of wooden knittin' needles, not bein' civilized."

"Have you and Suki a deal on that when he knifes me you'll give him some of my pearls?"

"Ow, no, sir! If I went in for that sort of trade, I wouldn't be warnin' you about it. I'd just let nature go on about its business and not stick my British nose into any knifin' matter."

"Thanks. And what if Suki was to take it into his head to knife you? Would you want me to interfere?"

"It might show you a profit if you did, Mr. Rolf—not that it's my place, sir, to be makin' remarks about what would be the proper course for you to take in a case like that, sir."

"You're rather a smart lad, Parkins!"

"If I do say it, sir, I ain't never missed no meals—yet."

"Go across and wait for me there."

Parkins backed the dinghy away from the beach. He headed then for the bight across the opening to the bay as Rolf disappeared into the shadows of the thickets beyond the palms.

But the steward did not stay on the other side. In a few minutes he throttled down the engine so that the propeller barely turned, and before the rising moon had lifted above the ridges of the land, again crossed the inlet and beached the dinghy near the spot where Rolf had landed.

With a small anchor out in the sand, Parkins sneaked up into the palms. He

called softly for Rolf. There was no answer to the call.

With a flashlight the steward found Rolf's tracks in the sand. They led to a shallow gully. Parkins, keeping in all the shade he could so as not to be visible in open moonlight, followed the gully that he knew would lead him to the other side of the island.

X

IN HALF an hour Rolf was at the fringe of jungle on the other side of Quarter Moon. He moved down into the wild palms along the shore and saw the *Alantra* in the moonlight at anchor behind the long reef off shore which made a natural breakwater. The white spume of battering breakers against the reef had a luminous aspect under the moon's silver.

Rolf surveyed the vessel with satisfaction. With Captain Barron so close at hand there was no problem that could not be easily solved. Parkins could play at pearling, Ellison could be held at the island, and Sunderland could keep a pearl or two—and none of them do much to interfere with the business in hand. There were ten Chinese aboard the *Alantra*. Barron would put them to work in his own way.

Giving a low whistle that sounded like the disturbed call of a jungle bird, Rolf counted thirty and repeated the whistle. He saw a sliver of light at a cabin port hole as a curtain was drawn. Then the light disappeared for a few instants and came on again. Rolf whistled a third time.

A dark object moved along the top of a bulwark. Rolf knew it for the head and shoulders of one of the Chinese. The man moved aft. He had been waiting for the whistle signals. Barron, through an open but curtained port, had also heard Rolf's whistles.

Slats rattled along the side of the hull. A side ladder was dropped. There were other figures moving on deck. Presently a dinghy was rowed around to the ladder and the single rower went up and popped over the bulwark. In the moonlight Rolf saw the figure of Barron come down the ladder and enter the dinghy. He rowed ashore with short, choppy strokes. He tossed out a grapple on the end of the painter, lifted a bulky bundle from athwart and dropped it over the stem head of the boat. Climbing over after it, Barron picked up the bundle, which Rolf could see was lashed with rope with a loop for a hand becket, and walked up toward the palms.

"First chance I've had to get this side," said Rolf. "When'd you get in?"

"Friday night." Barron dropped the bundle. It struck the sand with a jangling thud as heavy pieces of metal clashed together. Barron rubbed his hands. The weight of his bundle had strained his fingers on the becket. "I was wondering when you'd show up."

"Everything's okay," said Rolf.

"Nobody suspects I'm on this side?"

"No. What if they did? I've told Ellison that you might be in here—and he thinks that you own the old plantation. He won't be surprised to see you come round in the bay."

"I'll be in when we're ready and I get the right draft of wind."

"You bring some of it ashore?"

"Just enough buried here to have a good stake if anything goes wrong. I've buried a few slabs—up this way. Come on, and we'll go aboard. I don't want my Chinks alone too much. They might get ideas."

"Do they know about the gold?"

BARRON gathered his bundle and went closer to the jungle edge. "They know I've got some, but they think it's in the cabin. A few slabs'll shut their mouths, anyway, but they'd rather have cash—and they know that they always get their bite on anything good."

Rolf followed. Barron opened his bundle, took out an iron shovel used for ashes in the galley stove, and dug a shallow trench in the sand.

"Suki bringing up shell?"

"Plenty on the reef. And Ellison has seen two pearls from the lot so far. He's satisfied. And I'll plant a few more out of my lot." Rolf avoided worrying Barron about the trouble with Parkins.

"All we need to do is hold the yacht until we've got things set."

"The yacht can't get away." Barron covered the slabs of metal and straightened. "That makes twenty right here in line with those two palm clumps. We might need a few pieces—anyway, they'll keep here as well as anywhere. What with tons of it, it's wise to have a little salted down."

"We can always pick it up when we want it," agreed Rolf.

They walked down to the beached dinghy. Rolf got in. Barron shoved off and rowed toward the schooner. "Just as well that my Chinks know you're on the island," said Barron. "If you're here, they know somebody's with you. That'll keep 'em from trying to play horse with me—you never can tell with Chinks."

"Not with the Chinks you pick up that's been in the pirate game up Bias Bay way."

"They're the safest Chinks for me to have—and they do a good job when I

have to turn 'em loose with guns. I've always told you that I don't want any Chinks that ain't afraid of the police on their own account."

"I'm not so sure they're safe on a big game like this, Barron."

"Who'd be safer? These men of mine wouldn't dare show up in a port with raw gold in slabs. They couldn't stand being picked up and questioned. And they know better than to run with the schooner."

"Unless they could get into Bias Bay and into the Chink headquarters for pirates with your schooner and her cargo."

"They couldn't get through the patrols, Rolf. No, they're too smart to try it. Besides, as I said, they know that I pay well for their kind of work—and these men've done plenty for me that'd put 'em on the end of a rope on the execution ground in China."

"What if they figure that they'll be dangerous to you when this job is over—and that you'll know that—so you'll be likely to rid yourself of 'em in your own way."

"That's the chance we take. But we won't have to take it long. When my Chinks act up, or know too much, I attend to it."

"We can fix that all right when we're ready," agreed Rolf.

They drew near the side ladder at the schooner's waist. The heads of two Chinese looked down from the bulwark cap. Barron went up the ladder first, talked quietly, and then told Rolf to leave the boat.

Rolf secured the painter to the ladder. The two white men went aft and down the companion to the main cabin. The port holes were hung with closed curtains and towels over the curtains. One gimbal lamp burned on the bulkhead over the chart table.

Barron broke out a bottle and glasses. Rolf sat on the transom seat cushions.

"So far, so good," said Barron, as he filled the glasses. "And here's luck to the job ahead." He lifted a glass and looked across to Rolf. The *Alantra's* skipper was in good humor. His eyes twinkled and crinkled against the light from the lamp. "Rid of my Russians and a good job that Suki did on Komroff. That Jap's always on the job when needed. No wonder old An Lu gets rid of his enemies."

They drank and set the glasses aside.

"I need more cash," said Rolf. "About a thousand dollars."

"Okay. What for?" Barron pulled a chair away from the table, sat and cocked up his feet on a side bench. He opened a drawer in the table and looked in to make sure that a pair of pistols were near at hand and as he had left them. He took cartridge clips from a pocket and loaded the weapons.

"I want to fatten that steward up for my side. He's on the make, of course, but he'll be all right if he sees something that swings him the way I want him swung before we begin on the job."

"Does he know anything?"

"Nothing important. But he's a slick customer. He may suspect more than I think. Anyway, I want to cinch him."

"We can collect the cash back again, anyhow," said Barron. He drew a thick purse from a pocket, took off rubber bands, and from a thick wad of banknotes, counted off ten, each of a hundred dollars in yellow backs. He shoved the pile toward Rolf.

"A little cash will smooth things with that steward, no matter what he suspects." Rolf pocketed the notes.

"How about that new skipper?"

"Oh, Sunderland's all right. Not the type of man I'd try to tamper with. Doesn't care much about his job with Ellison, I'd say, but I don't see any chance to bargain with him."

"Gold or lead—that's the only way, Rolf."

"Right! Only way to talk to Sunderland's with lead."

"Think he's got any information that's

dangerous? That any pearls found are planted?"

ROLF evaded the questions so far as to avoid giving the truth of the situation with Sunderland. Anyway, Rolf was not certain that Parkins told the truth when he said that Sunderland had a pearl and Clara Fitch another.

"He knows that two pearls've been found. I didn't notice that he seemed surprised. I don't think that we need bother one way or another. He and the young woman along don't seem to pay much attention to what's going on. Of course, Sunderland's got a way, with the Fitch girl so close to Mrs. Ellison, to slip something over to Ellison in case things get puzzling. But unless the steward has run to Sunderland—and maybe he has—I don't think that the skipper sees anything wrong."

"What could the steward know?"

"He's been into my stuff on the sly."

"You mean your pearls?"

Rolf evaded again. "He knows that I've got pearls, yes."

"Then what you want is shut-mouth money."

Rolf nodded. It was just as well that Barron had no inkling of the true situation. If he did know, Barron might not be satisfied with the way Rolf had run things aboard the yacht.

"Blast that little Cockney! I always had a hunch that he knew Suki stabbed Komroff at the bridge." Barron spat in disgust.

"I've a hunch myself that way. He's been watching Suki, Parkins has, and if Sunderland or Ellison caught the idea that Suki's a killer, things might tauten up for us."

"Can Ellison get radio messages out?"

"No. His receiving set has been out of commish. The engineer, Anderson, has tinkered with it, but he's got a job on the engines. He's overhauling the Diesels."

"If he tinkers up the sending outfit, you put it out of business. We're monkeying with a big millionaire and we can't take any chances. A gunboat or destroyer'd be down here on the hot hop if Ellison got word out that he was in a jam."

Rolf thought for a minute. "I've considered all that. I'm not sure but what we'd play a safer game if we let the yacht get out of here, buried the gold, took some away with your vessel, and came back with pearling luggers now and then to pick up what's buried."

"You can get gold into a port with Ellison's yacht and not be under suspicion of smuggling. One slab of this stuff under my decks, and we're done. They'd hold us until we coughed up, and by the time they found a ton or so of it aboard the whole thing would crack wide open. A whole trainload of Czar's gold that came across Siberia and was stolen a dozen times. Everybody knows the story—the British especially, and the Japs, of course."

"It's hot stuff, I'll admit. You got away with enough back in port to finance us a little—but you risked one slab being hooked—and the Czar's mark on it."

"And broke my back filing it up, and then selling filings to An Lu at a loss so he'd get the cash for me. And I'm not so sure that Suki wouldn't run out on us and spill it all to An Lu."

"You think that An would run a lot of his Chink pirate pearlers down on us here?"

"He'd get into the game if he knew how fat it was."

"Then we can't operate with your vessel, another schooner that we buy, or luggers?"

"What do we need to for when we've got the yacht ready for the taking? We don't have to go to port with the yacht, but I'm in favor of taking a load in the bilges. We can red lead it, and it'll look like iron ballast."

"Or we can use the yacht to dribble the gold to half a dozen islands down here and then burn her—if we've got something

to get away with. We could keep the *Alantra* here, and run with her, no gold aboard, and pick up a lugger or two and come pearling this way."

BARRON nodded assent. "We'll work it the way we can. But I want to burn the *Alantra* in the bay. We can dribble the gold around, file up a batch of it, and with the yacht close to some port, sink her and make that port with one of her boats. Sink the boat, too."

"It's a ticklish game all around. But the yacht struck me as what we needed, when I got your letter."

"And that was a clever move," said Barron. "Ticklish is right. By this time the Japs or somebody around Vladivostok may have heard that the trainload of gold got away in the *Alantra*. The Japs may have known all the time that it was being loaded with the scrap. But where Komroff and the others fooled the Japs was to have my vessel cleared for Tsuraga, Japan, and then get secret clearance papers for S'pore. We got away before they could follow us, and it was a risky bet for me to put in with a leak—if the Jap consul had been warned to keep an eye out for me. I sweated a little blood, I'll tell you—especially when Komroff's body was identified. But they just didn't tie him to my vessel."

"They may have tied Komroff and the other two Russians to you by this time."

"You said it!" agreed Barron. "That's why I tell you that the *Alantra's* got to be finished off here. Besides, I'll be watched, no matter what port I hit, with or without her. Besides, An Lu knows that we headed for Quarter Moon. He knows that the yacht did, anyhow, and it won't take much Chink thinking for him to tie us together here. He knows that there's a big game on—and if Suki ever gets a chance, An Lu knows as much as we do."

"One quick jump and settle it so it can't be unscrambled."

"That's it, Rolf. We can't expect to take all our gold in the yacht. I can burn the *Alantra* in the bay, let her sink with scrap and all, and we can salvage the gold later. I'll unload, and load scrap again, to get out of it as much as we dare run with. So we need time with this Ellison of yours."

"I think we'll have plenty of time—if not, we'll have to make the time we need. You know how we'll do that."

"We don't want to do that until we've got gold ready to move."

"All right. I think that I can keep Ellison here another month or two—just keep feeding him a pearl now and then from the shell that comes up. And I've told you that he's seen two already and is hooked."

"What about the plantation house? Got anybody into that?"

"Crew sleeps there nights, mostly, Suki with 'em, now and then. The women spend their time ashore during the heat of the day. Suki and Anderson and Ellison go along with me when we go after shell. That leaves Parkins, Sunderland, and Chin, the cook aboard. Chin might be ashore during the day, now and then, and Parkins might be fiddling around ashore at the same time. That means that Sunderland is often alone aboard the yacht during the day. He's no great job—and we've cornered the yacht into our own hands."

"With my Chinks, we can handle the business any time we're ready. That old house ashore is a great help to keep the yacht's company split, and especially during the night. You've done a good job, Rolf."

THE pearler got to his feet. "I'd better be getting back. Parkins is waiting for me with a power boat, and that steward might get to nosing around. I'll be missing long enough when I get back to the bay beach."

Barron went along to the dinghy and rowed Rolf ashore, taking three more

slabs of gold to be buried before returning to the *Alantra*. Rolf set out on the path of the moonlit gully and making faster time than when he crossed the island to the *Alantra*, was on the bay beach in less than twenty minutes.

The dinghy was across the channel mouth. Rolf whistled for it and Parkins came surging across with throttle wide open.

"Seen anybody on the beach this side?" asked Rolf when the dinghy hit the shingle.

"No, sir. I took a nap on the other side. Just about done with it when I 'eard your whistle, sir."

"I've been nearly to the plantation house."

"We go back to the yacht now?"

"Yes. I've a little business to talk over on the way. Shut off when you're well out from shore."

"Very good, sir." Parkins backed away when Rolf was aboard. The pearler did not bother to go aft promptly, letting Parkins steer with the little side wheel under the gunwale.

A half mile on the way, Parkins stopped the motor. "I'm at your service, sir. But no tricks, mind."

"Turn that flashlight you've got there, this way. I want to show you something."

Parkins was cautious. He turned on the light and revealed Rolf's hands full of something that fluttered in the breeze. The steward had his right hand on his pocketed gun.

"Take a look at this, Parkins. One thousand dollars. There's more of this in the yacht, but all I want to show you now is that it'll pay you to play with me."

"Is that for me, sir?" asked Parkins.

"Yes—if I get my pearls back. I'll trust you to keep a promise, and deliver this now, if it's a bargain."

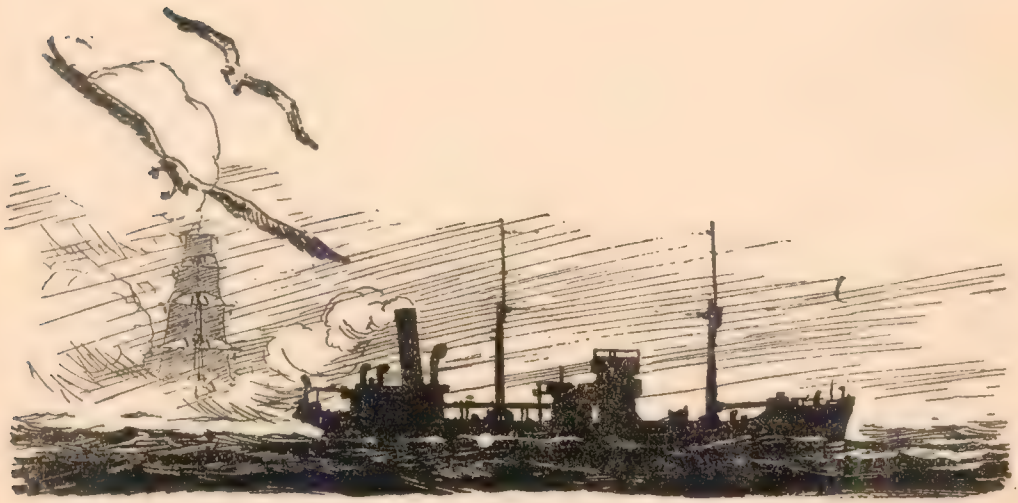
"Them two that Sunderland's got and the Miss Clara. Can't promise on them —not at the mo'."

"Any moment that suits you. We'll let those ride for now. Will you give me six pearls in the yacht?"

"Yes, sir."

Rolf handed over the banknotes. The dinghy resumed its course toward the *South Wind*.

(*Part III in the next* SHORT STORIES)



As a Stranger in the Castor Country, Bim Gallatin Thought He Was Received Like a Particularly Unwanted Inhabitant!

KILLER GANG

By HUGH CLYDE

Author of "Death Rides the Rainbow," etc.

TOPPING the last low summit above the Castor country, Bim Gallatin came abruptly on a leggy, freckled boy riding a pony bareback and leading a fine gray that bore a heavy saddle and wore a silver studded headstall.

"Hello, kid!" Gallatin said, pulling up.

The youngster jerked his cayuse to one side of the dusty road and stared.

"Who're you?" he challenged, instantly suspicious and wary.

"I'm a stranger. Heading for the Kent headquarters."

Though he wasn't more than twelve, the boy blasted forth a string of hair-curling blasphemies. "You get to hell out of hyar, back the way you come!" he yelled. "If you don't, Dirk an' Jim'll pump lead into you so's you'll leak! I'm a-tellin' you!"

And, kicking his pony viciously, he rode into a narrow trail along the ridge, the saddled gray following, and disappeared.

Gallatin, amazed, saw the last of him, then turned and looked around to see where he might have come from. Below and to the left there was a clearing in the trees and in the clearing a ramshackle cabin, a barn with sagging roof and a general air of poverty. But no smoke rose from the house and there was no one about, not even a horse or dog. No answer there! The rider shrugged. Mechanically he shifted his two heavy holsters. There was something sinister about the region; the violent enmity of the gangling kid and his threat about what somebody would do reminded Gallatin that he had heard Major Sams, his owner, say something about the evil nature of this Castor country. He hadn't paid much attention at the time. It didn't worry him too much now, for he was not the sort that worries, but when he started on toward his destination he rode a little more warily—studied the land around him a trifle more thoughtfully.

It was this attitude, indeed, that led him to the discovery of a well-used trail leading off to the right when he had ridden on a mile or two down the grade. By now the valley was spread out before

him; to the southeast he could see a little cow-town that was undoubtedly Castor and to the southwest some eight miles or so out the white-washed house and outbuildings of a good-sized ranch headquarters. French Kent's place was eight or ten miles west of Castor, Major Sams had told him; it was pretty clear that the trail he had come on was a short-cut that way. Gallatin's main idea was to get to Kent's, take a look at the she-stuff that was being offered the Y BarY, make selection of forty head or so and then hire two or three free riders to help him haze them north over the Chachucas and home.

He took the right-hand trail. It followed a hog-back, switch-backed down at a steep pace, reached the bottom of a pretty steep canyon and followed that crookedly southwest. A warm breeze blew up from below but the canyon was cool and pleasant. Gallatin watered at the tumbling creek—got down and stooped to cup up a drink for himself.

THEN a bullet zimmed past his ear, throwing up a spurt of roiled water, and a rifle-shot crashed above, its echoes running down and up the gorge reverberantly.

The stooping man shot sidewise, under the nose of his startled horse, as a second detonation roared. He scrambled to the lee of a rock while his horse spun around, stepping on one rein, jerked free and plunged off a rod or so, snorting and trembling.

"Steady, Pilot!" Gallatin said quietly. "It ain't you they 're rodding for!"

For a minute he lay low, awaiting developments. He heard a voice far above him, on the rim of the canyon, but could not make out what was said. A second voice answered, "Guess you got him!"

Then the quarry's keen ears picked up other sounds, but coming from farther down the canyon. Steel-shod hooves struck stone; two or three voices could be heard in indistinguishable question and answer. Gallatin got to his feet and, stooping and swerving, ran in under the cliff that came to the floor of the canyon almost sheer from the top. Here he was definitely out of range of the rifleman. But he was exposed to possible fire from the party that was coming up. He loosened his guns in their holsters, moved forward close to the wall, turned a corner.

A quarter of a mile away he saw three riders disappear into a tunnel of willows along the creek; they were riding his way, but at a slow pace and very warily. They failed to observe him.

He took a step or two more to gain the shelter of a big outcrop that came down into the canyon.

And there, huddled in a disorderly heap, lay the body of a big man. A cloud of flies arose and swarmed. The odor of death came to the rider's nostrils. The flies began to settle again.

Bim Gallatin had found the man he had ridden eighty miles to see. It was French Kent, the cattleman, and he had been dead at least two days.

KENT and Major Sams had been old friends; the Castor Valley breeder had been a visitor at the Y BarY several times and Gallatin had met and liked the curt, crusty, knowing man. This sudden discovery of his bloated body, a prey to flies and exposed to the ravages of buzzards and coyotes, filled him with anger. For without close scrutiny he could see that the stockman had been shot from behind and he could guess that it had been with a rifle and from a distance. The tough kid at the summit had mentioned Dirk and Jim. The Castor vicinity had a bad name. That mouldering homestead on the mountain above had looked reasonably enough like a hideout for renegades. And, if it had been some such that had twice tried to kill him as he stooped for a drink, it was more than probable that the murderers of his owner's old

crony were somewhere up there now, perhaps still peering down looking for something to get their sights on.

Gallatin stooped. French Kent's body lay awkwardly doubled over and a rifle butt was visible under him. Carefully Gallatin drew it out. It had not been fired, though spots of new rust appeared in the barrel and the outside was damp from lying on the gravel of the canyon. Gallatin stood looking at the weapon, wondering what had happened—how this experienced old-timer had ever allowed himself to be sundowned by assassins within a few miles of his own headquarters. And why?

Someone close at hand shouted, "Look out!" and a revolver spat lead that ripped the rusting rifle from the newcomer's hands and that set his fingers tingling with the impact. He whirled, fumbling for his two guns as another shot was thrown.

It burned his left leg and slapped into the rock behind him.

Two men, spinning their horses two ways, were drawing iron; the third, dismounted on the far side of his bay, was lifting a black gun to bead under the animal's neck.

"Wait a minute, boys!" Gallatin shouted. "You've got the wrong steer by the nose!"

"It's Story!" one of the three sang out. "Watch him, Homer!"

Gallatin was at least ten feet from the shelter of the outcrop and in a breath of time three well-armed and hard-shooting men would be blazing at him. Retreating he would offer them a perfect target; with the speed of a cat he dived forward, rolled over once—came to his knees behind a fallen tree-trunk. Across its top he spoke to them again.

"I'm not Story, whoever he is! Hold your lead! You've got me covered!"

Their answer was a blast of fire, that sent fragments of bark up and into the eyes of the hapless man crouched there.

Another gun spoke, with a sullen roar. It came from the canyon rim above.

ONE of the three men in the open threw up his hands, toppled, fell. His horse ran, dragging him by one caught boot till it shook him free. He lay motionless in the trail. The other two whirled their mounts for cover.

Gallatin, saved for the moment, found French Kent's rifle a few paces away from him. Half stooping he snatched it up and ran down into the willows, plunged through the creek and in an instant was on the far bank behind a tree. He looked up. There was a swift movement there on the mountain side that looked down into the canyon, and he steadied the rifle on the tree trunk, got a bead, pulled.

Almost with the second echo of the shot a man's body was catapulted from a clump of *chamise* into the air. It spraddled wide, struck on a shelf, rebounded—then came hurtling over the edge of the sheer cliff to fall with a crash into the thick underbrush at the foot of the wall, not two hundred feet away.

The two riders in the canyon, obviously bewildered, jumped from their saddles and took to cover. Gallatin watched them go, with a wry grin. By side-stepping he was able to keep his friendly tree between himself and them; he dropped his borrowed rifle so that it's smoking muzzle was addressed to them.

"Looks like the shooting is about over,

boys," he said. "If you'll come out and tell your right names, maybe we can save powder!"

A rangy, tow-headed youth replied, cautiously. "You—you got that feller on the rim! One o' the Evering gang, likely! But that don't make no sense who you are!"

"I'm a Y Bar Y rider, cowboy! And sure have had a hot welcome to your country!"

"A Y Bar—?"

"That's Major Sam Sams' outfit, ain't it?" the second piped forth.

"It was, when I pulled out yest'day!"

"Then what was you doin' down here with a rifle throwed down on us when we rode up?"

"I was looking it over to see if Major Sams' friend, French Kent, had had a show for his alley when he was shot down here, two-three days back."

The two men, relaxed a little and inclined to be friendly, froze on this. They glanced at one another. The tow-head sidled over to the protection of a jack pine.

"You talk smooth, mister!" he said in puzzled fashion. "But how come you to know so much about Mr. Kent? We been a-lookin' for him sence Sunday and ain't nobody found hide ner hair of him."

His companion growled at him. "Shut up, loose-mouth!" He turned to Gallatin; he thumbed his revolver cylinder nervously. "You sayin' suthin' 'bout French Kent gettin' hisself shot, was you? Where? An' how come you know all about it? If you got any answers they better be good ones!"

Gallatin, glancing up at the wooded mountainside above, saw two horses being ridden westward and downward along a steep road and off into the distance. With the rifle held ready but at ease he stepped into the open, facing the two riders in the canyon.

"Come and get your own answers, boys!" he said quietly. And he jerked a thumb toward the out-crop behind which lay the body of the cattleman who had been his owner's friend.

HALF an hour later Bim Gallatin was riding southwest down the canyon, making for the Kent headquarters.

Homer Dye, the tow-headed cowboy, had been left to guard the body of his late employer and to keep watch on his fellow who had been bush-whacked from above and of the crumpled and broken body at the foot of the cliff.

"Feller they called Durango, he is," Short Glaspell, the second Kent rider had said. "One o' the Everings, all right —a killer gang!"

And presently Glaspell had ridden in another direction to report at the town of Castor the finding of the body of the slain stockman.

Gallatin had turned to the tow-headed youth. "What is this killer gang, Dye?" he had demanded. "And why did they kill your owner?"

"They're a nachel-borned mean bunch o' ki-otes!" Homer Dye had replied. "Been owl-hootin' an' rustlin' an' up to every kind o' hellishness the' is for years. Seems like our boss got numbers on 'em and they were afeared o' him."

"If he knew that how did he come to get himself out here alone and right in the line of their fire?"

"He was that a-way," Dye had replied. "Didn't have no fear o' nothin' an' wouldn't listen to nobody! Us boys tried to side him when he went out around, but he got away f'om us Sunday mornin'. An' that's the last anybody seen of him! Till now."

"My owner thought a lot of French Kent."

"Hell, stranger, everybody thought a lot o' him! An' it'll shore be tough on Lucille."

"Lucille. His daughter?"

"Gran'-daughter. Bang-upedest durn little girl in these parts, Lucille is. She's

been figgerin' last few hours that we wouldn't never find the old man alive—but that won't make it no easier for her when she finds out jest what happened."

The upshot of the conversation had been that Gallatin had ridden on. "Maybe I can tell her easier than you boys could," he had suggested.

But there was something more than that in his mind as he pushed his Pilot horse along down the canyon bed at a reaching lope. What he was remembering was that the two horsemen he had seen on the ridge had been forking it westward. If they were members of this Evering crowd—this killer gang, as Glaspell had called them—they might be up to any meanness. Their dead had been found. They must know by now from that tough boy the Y Bar Y rider had met at the summit that there was a stranger headed for the Kent layout; if, as seemed probable, they were of the party that had fired on him at long range and had killed one of the Kent cowboys they might throw off all secrecy and ride in on this young girl whose grandfather they had shot from ambush in the canyon two days before.

EVENING began to fall before Gallatin came out on to the floor of the valley; when he did emerge he could just make out the white dots that were the headquarters buildings of the Kent spread. His horse had done seventy miles and odd since sunup Monday morning, but he carried an easy rider and now Gallatin crowded him in order to get to his destination as soon as possible. In the dusk the newcomer could see that it was a well-ordered ranch through which he rode; the line and boundary fences were kept up, the pasturage had been grazed with judgment and the white-faced cows and bulls that French Kent was making a name for in the cattle country were sleek and contented. The sort of place a man would like to own! A sound and interesting business, too—this breeding pure-breds in order to give the range country better bulls and so improve the strain of native, Texan and Mexican, stock that now prevailed. He began to wonder about this little granddaughter of Kent's. Who would take care of her now; who would show up to take over the property? Some nephew or son, likely, though Gallatin couldn't remember ever having heard that Kent had any kin. Poor little girl! Tough on a kid—this sort of thing!

The long, steady stride of his gelding brought him to a line of cottonwoods that bordered an irrigating ditch and the county road; he pulled the horse to a walk and looked through the trees toward the Kent place. It was as well kept and prosperous-looking as the outlying ranch properties; there was a sprawling house of adobe, a big horse-barn, a feeding barn for stock and numerous well spaced and attractive out buildings and tool sheds. Chickens made themselves at home behind the house and all over the barnyard, a peacock flew screaming to the roof of a shop and a big sleek cat rose on a fence rail, stretched, jumped down smoothly and crossed the yard toward the back door. In a lot a quarter of a mile from the house a stolid man milked a cow.

BUT there was no sign that the riders from the ridge had come that way and Gallatin, touching spurs, jogged up, turned into the barn lane—stopped at the front walk of the house. He hated this job. He began to wish he hadn't been so ready in volunteering to bring the bad news! He knew little enough about girls, never having been handy with them; the thought of breaking tragic tidings to a frightened youngster slowed him down. But perhaps, he thought, there would be a woman around—a cook or a housekeeper or someone—to whom he could tell the story so that she could

pass it on to the granddaughter of the slain man.

His spurs dragged and clattered along the uneven floor of the wide veranda that ran the length of the front of the house. There were planted pots on the rail of this porch and at either end several stone mortars such as most Southwesterners recover from old Indian mounds and camping grounds and use for ornaments. A shaggy, feeble dog rose slowly and came towards him, sniffing—dejected at the news his nose brought. He was old and almost blind; Gallatin knew that he was grieving—waiting for some one who would never come again.

He knocked gently on the front door. There was a moment's wait, then a timid voice faltered, "Come in!"

Taking off his hat Gallatin pulled open the light screen door and stepped across the threshold.

Instantly his arms were pinned to his sides; two men ripped his guns violently from their holsters. A girl screamed.

"So you got here, did you, Big Ears?" a voice snarled. "Well, now you're here, move over to that far wall and let's have a look at you."

Shrugging, Gallatin crossed the room toward the wide and open window indicated. His quick eyes found the girl, standing near a tall, old-fashioned desk in a corner; she was lithe, tall, golden-haired, with blue eyes that seemed to give him a message of pity—almost of apology. He threw her a reassuring smile, that had in it more confidence than he felt. "Killer gang!" The Everings! And, glancing out of the window towards which his steps were directed, he saw two horses standing with grounded reins under an apple tree close by the house. A dark bay—and that fine big gray with its silver trappings that he had seen led west at the summit two hours before. Yes, both ways these renegades had outsmarted him! With plenty of warnings he had yet walked into their trap. And now——

BUT he was given no time to look for a way out. As he turned at the open window to face the room he heard that snarling voice rise again.

"Make it short, Dirk!"

Bim Gallatin sized up his captors quickly. The speaker was an under-sized but powerful man with a scarred face and a twitching eye; his companion, undoubtedly Dirk Evering, leader of the bad crowd, was taller, handsome in a dark, bold fashion, and in better command of himself than the first. He spoke quietly, with assurance.

"This is the man we was telling you about, Lucille," he said. "We'll take care of him for you, soon's our business is done here." He laughed a little. "Come to think of it, likely he'd oblige you by signing them papers as witness. Make it sort of more legal that way, I reckon."

The girl replied in a voice that Gallatin saw she was trying hard to control. "I don't see why the papers can't wait," she was saying. "You haven't proved that granddad is—isn't coming back!"

"Proved it?" the scarred-faced man snapped. "We done told you, ain't we, what we seen?"

"You only said you thought it was my grandfather, lying up there in the canyon, Jim. And you saw a man—but are you sure it was this stranger here?"

"What would we want to lie for?" Jim Evering demanded. "Ain't we the best friends you got in the Castor country? Didn't we think we'd dropped this feller, like we told you?"

His brother cut in. "Drag your heels, Jim!" he growled, then turned to the girl. "French Kent—your granddad—he told you he was going to meet up with us, didn't he? That was Sunday?"

"He told me he—had an appointment, yes. But he didn't say it was with you."

"It was, though. We met him and

made the deal for the stock. Eighty head. We sold 'em over the Chachucas to the Farnsworth boys, like I told you. An' we promised Lou Farnsworth to deliver 'em tomorrow, which means we got to start drivin' at daybreak. The deal'll mean around twelve hundred dollars to you—and, way things are now, honey, you'll likely need the money."

The girl put a hand to her eyes and, though she fought them, tears pushed through her fingers.

"I—I don't know what to do! If we could wait till Mr. Atwater comes out from town—the lawyer, you know."

JIM EVERING growled something under his breath; his brother nodded and crossed to the girl. Although he was still quiet and mannerly enough there was something about the look of him that made Bim Gallatin's muscles flex and his eyes turn cold. But the man with the scarred face moved a step or two forward from the front door and the two guns he held menaced the stranger by the window as pointedly as though they were already smoking.

Dirk Evering put fingers of steel on Lucille Kent's wrist and drew her forward. His voice was chilly.

"Come on, girl," he said; "we've wasted enough time now. Set down and put your name to this bill of sale."

She cried out. "Dirk! Dirk Evering! You're hurting me!"

"I'll break your arm, cuss you!" Evering broke out, suddenly letting his held temper fly. "Make it easy for yourself!"

Bim Gallatin, choking back the fierce anger that flooded his whole mind and body at the sight of this handsome, black-faced devil torturing the helpless girl, called out authoritatively, "Take it easy, there, Evering! You haven't got long to live; you don't want to make hell any hotter for yourself than you have to, do you?"

The impudent challenge checked Dirk Evering momentarily. He relaxed his grip on the girl's wrist—turned toward the man by the window.

"What was that last again, Mouthy?" he demanded. "What about me not living long?"

"I told you—and you heard me! I found Mr. Kent's body in the box canyon below where you and your precious gang hole out; there are two men of his that know of it and one of them has ridden to your county seat for the sheriff and the coroner. If you're real smart you and your ugly brother will make tracks—and make them hot and fast!"

The girl, her eyes widening, had uttered a little cry at this abrupt blurting of the tragic news; she checked the emotions that tore her; she turned to face the sneering, black-eyed renegade.

"Oh, that's how it was, then?" she cried. "It was this stranger found my granddad's body! Doc Brown and Shorty Glaspell and Homer Dye rode that way at noon; I—I was afraid they'd find—"

The Evering with the scar across his ugly face ripped out an oath. "You goin' to gawp around there all night, Dirk?" he demanded, in that snarling, wolf's voice of his. "Put the damn' skirt's arm in a sling and let's get ridin'. With that bill o' sale and the herd movin'—an' nothin' nobody can't prove, what're you waitin' for?"

The sneer stung Dirk Evering; he tightened his grasp of that white wrist. "You heard, Lucille!" he snapped. "Sign—and make it short, you blamed little pussy-cat, you!"

The girl bent forward, yielding before the strain the brutal renegade put on the muscles and sinews of her wrist and forearm. Gallatin, by the window, took a backward step—crouching.

"Keep out o' this, you!" Jim Evering shouted. "All I want is a chance to drill you!"

Gallatin, drawing a quick breath, expelled it in a shrill, startling yell that

broke into the room like the scream of an enraged puma.

He seemed to turn a back-flip like an acrobat; his body hurtled through the thin screen on the open window and his spurred boots, describing a parabola, clipped the bottom of the raised window sash, shattering the glass with a tinkling crash. He disappeared into the dusk.

"Get him, Jim!" Dirk Evering squalled.

Simultaneously both the guns of the scarred-faced man roared. One bullet splintered the window-frame; another whistled harmlessly through the opening. The gunman's feet thudded across the floor.

Outside, the two standing horses, panicked by scream, crashing glass and the gunfire, wheeled and ran. Bim Gallatin, crouched close to the house wall immediately under the window, had not drawn more than one quick, gasping breath when the two guns of the younger Evering were shoved above the sill. Gallatin snatched one, jerking it from the outlaw's hand with a violence that pulled the man half out of the aperture.

Bim Gallatin, on the ground, spun the weapon—fired point-blank.

The revolver belched thin smoke and a spurt of orange-colored flame into the scarred face, that ceased to resemble a face.

The body to which it belonged slumped to the window-sill and hung there, half in and half out of the room.

But Gallatin was not held by this unnerving picture.

HE shifted the snatched gun to his left hand, leaped to the edge of the porch, caught up one of the heavy, round, hollowed-out stone Indian mortars that stood there as a display. He was no discus thrower, but by instinct he held that clumsy implement as though he had been—fingers gripping the bowl as it rested in the crook of his wrist. He sent it rumbling, tumbling, jumping, bounding along the porch. Because of the uneven boarding the mortar hit and bounced—thumped and bounded on; the effect was exactly that of running feet.

"I'll get him, Jim!" Evering shouted. He could be heard plunging across the living room toward the front door.

But as he reached that entrance—there swinging out two guns to meet and mow down the enemy he thought he heard—that enemy, using only one hand, vaulted back in through the big open window, to which he had instantly returned.

"Wrong again, Evering!" Bim Gallatin called, steadying himself just inside the big room, his back to the collapsed body of the younger outlaw brother.

Dirk Evering, with a terrible screamed oath, flung about—fired.

But his two shots went wild.

Another shot had punctuated their sentence in the middle.

The renegade staggered, straightened. A ludicrous stare of amazement spread over his face. He seemed to look down, as though puzzled. Then his knees buckled. He pitched forward, stiffly, to the floor.

The pounding hooves of horses came from outside—from the darkening night. A voice shouted, "What's up here? This is Sheriff Baines—"

Bim Gallatin, holstering the gun he had snatched from Jim Evering and instantly, by the feel of it, had discovered was his own, had turned to the golden-haired girl.

Her lips parted—one hand stretched out—she had called to him, her voice husky, "Are you hurt? Are you—all right?"

Then, courageous in the face of tragic loss and dramatic climax—the collapse of the last desperate stand of the outlaw "killer gang" from the summit of the Chachucas—she had walked slowly towards the Y Bar Y rider, her face thanking him—her blue eyes saying something to him that, perhaps, in days to come, he could interpret in words.

THUMBER

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

Author of "Death Sentenced," "Panhandle Pete," and Other Stories of Rainier National Park

SEVERAL men with trucks had descended upon several of the animals in Rainier National Park and carted them to another and newer park in the Cascade Mountains several miles northward. Numbered among those captured were the tamer of the wild creatures—tamer because they frequented Longmire's and were petted and spoiled by the park tourists. Panhandle Pete, with his boundless faith in mankind had been an easy mark. His son, Chiseler, a young fellow now sporting two points and giving promise of stepping

forth with a fine spread of antlers in a year or two, had been captured without difficulty. Old Lady Riley, who had been a wrestling bear in her younger days, had given the snatchers a little trouble.

They had scorned her protests, and hell hath no greater fury than a woman scorned. The ride northward on the truck hadn't been so bad. It reminded her of the days when a young Italian owned her. They had traveled from town to town, putting on wrestling matches. Then her owner, wishing to join Italy in her African adventure, had left the bear at the park and disappeared. Old Lady Riley had made herself comfortable enough. In due time she had been released along with Panhandle Pete, Chiseler and a bluejay named Noisy Nat.

As the trucks turned around on the lonely mountain road, the bluejay had noticed a big cougar in the brush. As he sounded his rasping warning, the two bucks and the bear had caught the cat's scent. Panhandle Pete had followed the trucks a short distance, then sensing he was on his own had headed into the dense forest. Chiseler, in a panic, had vanished and Old Lady Riley had plunged into a creek and made her way across a beaver pond to a little island in the center of the pond.

She was furious. She hadn't received such a fright in years and she blamed everything on the two legged animals known as man. In the park if anyone annoyed the animals Buck Seaton or some other park ranger put a stop to it. A bear, for example, had no difficulty in securing food. She merely sauntered down to the garbage dump and filled up; but in Old Lady Riley's case this wasn't always necessary. She had learned that if she stood in the middle of the road the cars would stop. She would then advance and peer in at the driver.

She was quite aware of the fact that the drivers were scared stiff half the time —animals realize when they inspire fear —but she never took advantage of this fear other than to beg for candy or food. Entire lunches had often been given her while the braver members of an auto party took photographs. It was pretty soft. Old Lady Riley liked it.

NOW she shook the water from her shaggy coat and took stock of the situation. Chiseler was nowhere in sight, the rumble of the trucks had died away and several minutes had passed since the cougar had chased Panhandle Pete up the side of the mountain.

She duly noted a fine green skunk cabbage with a yellow blossom. Skunk cabbage is the black bear's spring tonic. Old Lady Riley tuned up her system by nibbling a few leaves, then she looked with interest at the road which skirted the pond and then followed the meanderings of the creek.

It was about time a tourist party came along with something to eat. The bear could not know this was a new park and tourists were not likely to appear in numbers until considerable development had taken place. Stocking the area with wild animals was merely the first step in the general improvement of the area.

She waited a couple of hours, and no sound broke the silence save the musical song of the hurrying stream. A beaver swam under the surface for several rods and then came up to find out why the water in the pond was lower. Old Lady Riley had climbed over the dam in her haste and left a dent where her heavy body had crushed down the mud and sticks. Water was pouring through.

The bear wasn't interested in the beaver; it could always move about the pond much faster than herself.

The beaver disappeared and presently returned with several others. Perhaps there was discussion and a ways and means committee formed. Old Lady Riley didn't consider that angle; she was merely curious about the activity.

The beavers swam to the bank, crawled out and set to work on a tree. Their teeth cut and removed bits of clean, fresh wood and scattered it about. A faller working in the big timber could not have used better judgment. The tree would drop neither upstream nor down, but across the pond from which point the current would float the tree to the damaged section.

While Old Lady Riley watched, something happened which stirred her interest to the depths—a salmon leaped into the air, struck the fast water pouring through the break and rushed into the pond. It stopped in quiet water and rested.

The bear could not know the dam had stood as a barrier to further progress upstream and that the pool below the dam was alive with salmon. The break had not only lowered the level of the water behind the dam, but it had also afforded sufficient volume for the fish to swim through.

The salmon, quick to take advantage, moved upstream by scores. Sometimes there were as many as a half dozen fish in the air at the same moment. Time passed and Old Lady Riley watched the migration with something approaching fascination. The crash of the tree startled her. She snorted in alarm, started to leave, then paused as a beaver came to the surface.

The beaver gnawed off the top of the tree and several of its companions removed offending limbs. Then aided by the current they forced the log into position. Branches were floated down and drawn in to the break. The entire colony was now hard at work, filling in with brush dragged from ashore, and clay mined from the bank. The water commenced to rise in the dam again as the break was repaired.

OLD LADY RILEY saw the last of the salmon disappear upstream. She plunged in, swam some distance and crawled out onto the bank. She shook nearly a hundred pounds of water from her heavy fur, then stalked slowly along the bank, her eyes on the shallows. Suddenly she stopped and peered intently at the water. Under the bright bubbles she saw the shadowy outline of a salmon, resting before tackling the rapids ahead.

She grew tense, the great claws sliced through the air, struck the water and swerved upward. Water and spray filled the air. Her paw almost emptied the small pool, but a salmon flopped on the grass ten feet away.

Old Lady Riley killed the fish then returned to the pool. In a few minutes another salmon paused there to rest. Again she smacked the pool a mighty blow and again a salmon flopped about on the bank. She caught another several minutes later, then enjoyed a good meal.

Curling up in a sheltered spot the bear rested, lulled into a sense of security and relaxation by the murmur of the wind through the tree tops.

She awakened with a start to find a new day dawning. Noisy Nat, the bluejay, was heaping maledictions on the head of some intruder. He shifted from tree to tree, a splash of life and color against the somber forest.

Old Lady Riley became alert. While it was true many of her instincts had dulled during the months she performed on the stage as a wrestling bear, nevertheless she

had picked up the ways of her kind around Longmire's. And she accepted the bluejay's warning at face value.

She lifted her head slightly and saw Chiseler standing stiff-legged and alert. The young buck's head jerked around in alarm as the bear's weight broke a twig. Then he saw a friend he remembered from infancy, and bounded over to sniff at the bear. Noisy Nat shifted to a thicket and Old Lady Riley noticed a bobcat slinking through the brush near the creek bank. She snorted, and the cat vanished. The fear which almost paralyzes animals stalked by the dread cougar, vanished and the bear and buck moved leisurely through the forest.

DEEP within them was the urge to return to the forest in the shadows of Mount Rainier. It was home. Like Panhandle Pete the two missed the comforts of civilization, the petting, the photographing and the sweets. But unlike the big buck, neither could travel swiftly over a long period of time, nor move with Pete's unerring instinct.

From time to time Chiseler ate grass, but Old Lady Riley was looking for a road, with cars and people on it. She was getting hungry again; and though she studied the pools intently, there were no more salmon.

The day passed without incident. They saw smaller animals, but mostly they had the forest to themselves. Once a cougar, lying in wait, caught their scent, but Noisy Nat mounted a limb directly above and cursed with so much feeling the cougar moved away in disgust.

Dawn of the next day found Chiseler well fed from two hours' breakfasting in a mountain meadow. Old Lady Riley could find nothing that suited her tastes. She crossed a low ridge, descended to a new stream and looked for salmon. There were none. She prowled about seeking a road and the scent of man. She found neither, but presently came on a muddy pool with a steep, slick bank. The bear slid down the bank several times, splashing about in the pool and enjoying herself, while Chiseler looked on, puzzled. Tired of this sport Old Lady Riley plodded on through the forest until she found a small meadow. It was dense with wild flowers and the hum of bees filled the air.

Old Lady Riley and Chiseler dozed in the sunshine while the grim, snow-clad peaks looked on benignly. On a limb near by Noisy Nat slept lightly. Old Lady Riley awakened with a start, conscious of a scent vaguely familiar, and also quite the most pleasing thing she had ever known. Her responses to the scent were instinctive, but not entirely so because on several occasions she had tasted and scented honey in the park. Twice tourists had given her honey smeared on bread and once she had found a portion of a comb in the garbage dump.

She got up, stretched and sniffed again. Then, moving steadily into the breeze, she crossed a corner of the mountain meadow and pushed her way through a thicket to a fallen tree. Chiseler followed and Noisy Nat perched curiously on the limb above. His cursing now had dwindled to a casual "hell" or "damn."

A steady stream of bees flew from the meadow to a crack in the log, and out again. To Chiseler bees were just so many bugs and the young buck failed to understand the bear's interest. However, she was a connecting link with the immediate past and he waited patiently until she tired of this nonsense and was ready to go somewhere. He stamped his slim legs, snorted to express his high spirits and flipped his short tail warning the world of imaginary enemies.

Old Lady Riley stood on her hind legs, dug her claws into the bark and pulled. A slab fell off, revealing rotten wood and a rather long, narrow crack. The few bees in the air began circling and expressing mild annoyance. One of them dropped onto the bear's neck and tried to sting, but

all he did was to upend itself in a dense forest of fur.

Old Lady Riley inserted her claws into the crack and sent them deep in the strip of sound wood running between the rotten core and the equally rotten outer section. She heaved and the wood split, but did not break away. From the interior of the log there came a pronounced buzzing.

This meant nothing to Old Lady Riley. She heaved again, turning all of her great shoulder strength into her problem. The sound wood broke free with a sharp snap and a section of log some six feet long, a foot wide and nine inches thick broke off. Old Lady Riley brushed it impatiently aside. Chiseler stretched his neck to its limit and poked an inquisitive nose toward the opening. It was at this moment that golden honey began flowing from the log, and all hell broke loose.

THERE was fresh honey with white wax, and there was old, dark honey with wax almost black. It reminded Chiseler of candy a girl tourist had once fed him. He thrust his nose toward it just as a cloud of bees alighted and humped their backs.

Red hot needles drilled into his nose. With a snort the buck reared backward so suddenly the momentum carried him flat on his back with hoofs in the air. He whistled in stark terror, bounded to his feet and fled. Old Lady Riley was alone except for the bees and Noisy Nat.

The bluejay felt something strike his neck and stab a nerve. He sped away with wings a blur of blue at the same time reaching new heights in profanity. Old Lady Riley was now alone save for the bees.

She dipped both paws deep into the honey and dragged them dripping to her mouth. She moaned slightly as bees stung her lips, eyelids and tongue. She started to go away from there, but the love of honey was too strong. Again and again she dragged chunks of honey, wax and bees to her mouth and swallowed her loot. Again and again she twitched sharply as a bee contacted.

The unusual flood of sweetness to her stomach left her a bit giddy. She shuddered, hesitated, and a new cloud of bees settled on her. Some strange force was spraying her with electric needles. With a loud howl Old Lady Riley raced through the brush and jumped into the nearest creek. The bees were now alone.

Old Lady Riley emerged from the creek, shook the water from her coat and then pawed at her eyes. The lids were closing and she couldn't see a thing. In a panic she began running, and presently crashed into a tree with sufficient force to stun her.

Dazed, she got to her feet and began blundering around, only to be violently halted by rocks, logs and trees. Utterly wretched she curled up in the open to await eventualities. She had an idea either Chiseler or the jay would return, but the buck was nearly two miles from the bee tree and still going. The jay had lost his sense of direction and for the time being was trying to lose the lump from his neck. It seemed to him it didn't belong there. It reminded him of the time he had been trapped and someone had tied a string to his leg.

ABOUT all Old Lady Riley could do for two days was to breathe with her mouth open. Her nostrils were swollen shut and she was blind. Then she began to see light with her right eye and the blur of the forest. She moved heavily through the timber and stumbled onto a Forest Service trail. Instantly she grew hopeful. This was similar to the trails around Longmire's. Perhaps this one led to familiar scenes.

She traveled hours and found nothing that satisfied her appetite. She ate grass and chewed away at brush, but she needed something that would take hold. Twice she searched the banks of small creeks, but

they were creeks feeding mountain lakes and the salmon could not reach them.

Old Lady Riley finally emerged from the big timber to find herself on a broad concrete highway. Her joy was boundless. Such avenues through the forest meant automobiles and automobiles often meant tourists with food. She saw a car bearing down, and stood up on her hind legs, then waddled to the center of the highway. In the parks this usually stopped traffic, but here things seemed to be different.

The driver stared in astonishment, then swung wide to clear the bear. His right side wheels bounded into the soft shoulder bordering the highway and for several moments he wrestled with his steering wheel in an effort to keep the car from going into a bad skid. He got the car back onto the road again, swearing with the feeling of a man who has had seven kinds of hell scared out of him and then discovers he is safe and unhurt. He resolved he would write to the editor of his favorite newspaper and put a stop to wild animals roaming highways.

Old Lady Riley was disappointed. She stood, with a pained expression in her one open eye, long after the sound of the car faded into the distance. An hour passed and a battered flivver rounded the turn. Old Lady Riley lined up like a hitch-hiker and did everything but thumb a ride. The flivver stopped. A woman in the back seat screamed at her husband, "Willyum you turn around as fast as you can and get out of here. That bear might get right into the car with me."

"Aw now, Helen," the man protested, "bears are friendly creatures and——"

"Willyum will you do as I say or must I make a scene?" she interrupted.

"Yes, Helen, dear," Willyum said obediently. He turned the flivver about and drove away, with Old Lady Riley in hot pursuit. She ran until she was exhausted, then lay down to await results. A motorcycle whizzed by, but the driver failed to notice the bear.

OLD LADY RILEY plodded down the highway, heading south. At length she came to a clearing where she paused and sniffed. It was now dark, but there was light in the house, and she smelled wood smoke and heard human voices.

She tore down a rail fence and entered the clearing. A peaceful old cow caught the bear's scent and stampeded, to the serious damage of her future milk production. A man came to the door and said, "I wonder what that was?"

Old Lady Riley started toward the door, but the man concluding he was hearing things, closed the door and turned on the radio. Old Lady Riley sniffed about the barn and filled a horse with panic. The animal almost kicked his stall down before the scent faded, but even then he continued to roll his eyes and snort.

A slight grunting sound from a nearby pen caught Old Lady Riley's ears. She sauntered over and peered at a half dozen pigs. The pigs froze in their tracks, silent, save for an occasional grunt, grunts filled with the deepest suspicion. Old Lady Riley had never dined on pork, but the prospect was promising. She tore down the bars, made a rush, caught up a half grown pig and started for the brush. The pig's frightened squeals made the night hideous.

A woman screamed, "Shut off the infernal radio, somethin's wrong with the pigs." The music stopped and a moment later a man raced through the door, thrusting shells into a double-barreled shotgun as he ran. "Man or beast," he panted, "I'll learn 'em somethin'!"

He caught a glimpse of Old Lady Riley as she neared the brush, threw the gun to his shoulder and fired. The bear had been in hailstorms, but none of them equaled this hailstorm that hit horizontally instead of dropping from the sky. She dropped the squealing pig and humped herself. A second charge hit her just as she gained the brush.

"It's a bear," the man yelled at his wife. "Golly, if I'd knowed that I'd loaded Old

Betsy with buckshot. Wouldn't do no damage, except to sting hell out of him."

Old Lady Riley put a good mile between herself and the clearing before stopping. She twisted her head around and licked her hind quarters, half expecting to find wounds, but her fur and hide were too thick. The shot had struck and bounced off.

Day was breaking and it was raining hard when she again found the highway. She had never felt hungrier for the accustomed things, nor looked on a drearier world. Traffic was hardly worth mentioning—mostly big trucks and buses operating on schedule and traveling around fifty miles an hour at this point. She had learned that big trucks and buses didn't stop to feed bears.

IT WAS nearly dusk before a car appeared that offered promise. Old Lady Riley stepped into the middle of the road and a big sedan slowed to a stop. Windows were rolled down and four girls peered at the bear. "Isn't she just too cute for words," one of them exclaimed. "But what's happened to her eyes and nose. She's been in a fight."

"Something stung her," another girl said. "Bees most likely. Bears like honey, I'm told. She acts hungry. Give her a sandwich."

By the time one of the two girls in the rear seat had opened a big basket the bear was looking into one of the car windows and putting forth an exploratory paw. The four passengers pressed themselves against the other side of the car, and Old Lady Riley smirked, accepting a timidly extended sandwich.

"People back East will never believe this happened," said the girl who was driving. "Irene, do get out and take a picture."

"The light isn't very good," Irene protested.

"I know it, but take your candid camera, open the lens rather wide and give it about a seventy-fifth of a second. That should stop her. Her movements are slow. Take two or three just to be sure you get a good one," the driver insisted.

The girl called Irene got gingerly out on the opposite side and tried the first picture at a hundred feet distant. Then art began to struggle with caution and to win partial victory. Irene edged up. "Keep her interested, Charlotte," she urged. "Hold the sandwich up high and make her reach for it. That's it." Charlotte, leaning through the door window, made Old Lady Riley reach for it.

Then one of those little things that sometimes change the course of empires happened. Charlotte chanced to rest a portion of her weight on the door handle. "Look out," Marie, the driver screamed. It was too late. The door popped open and Charlotte sensing she would fall in front of the bear made the most of her momentum and was across the highway in the space of two seconds.

Old Lady Riley observed this strange proceeding with interest. Humans were always doing things far beyond her understanding. She saw, however, that the basket was still in the rear of the car and reached for it.

The other two girls screamed in protest, then, as the bear forced her bulk into the car, they leaped out. "Now we are in a mess," Marie moaned.

Irene, carried high on the crest of photographic art, failed to be disturbed. "I got one of Charlotte coming out of the car," she exclaimed, "and I think I caught Marie with both feet in the air as she left. Oh, I do hope they are good."

"What'd we better do?" Martha, the

fourth girl asked. "That bear is just wolfing down our lunch."

"Oh darn the lunch!" Marie snapped. "We can buy lunches anywhere, but how are we going to get her out of there? Do you realize its raining pretty hard, too?"

"Maybe she'll come out when she finishes our lunch," Charlotte hopefully suggested.

THEY huddled together by the side of the road and watched Old Lady Riley dine in a leisurely manner. When she finished the girls approached, waved their arms and yelled, "Shoo! Scat! Beat it!"

Old Lady Riley fixed her open eye upon them and ignored their threats. A woman scorned, she was now doing a little scorning on her own account.

"What shall we do?" Marie asked. "I'm almost soaked to the skin and she acts as if she intended making a night of it. Our threats mean nothing to her."

"We might try prayer," Martha said.

"Don't be silly, Martha," Marie retorted. "Maybe someone will come along." She looked hopefully down the road. All she saw was a black cloud rolling in from the southwest.

It presently paused overhead and opened the flood gates. The rain hit the pavement so hard it bounced. The four girls found partial shelter under a tree.

"We should turn on the lights," Marie said. "It's so dark some car might pile into ours."

"I'm not going to be clawed to death," Charlotte said, "just to avert a tragedy that'll never happen."

Salesmen of that particular car had waxed eloquent when speaking of the roomy rear seat. Pictures were published of a buxom girl, flanked by men who are both wide and thick, occupying the seat with room to spare.

Old Lady Riley confirmed all that had ever been said or written by curling up on the seat and relaxing. When she had toured the country as a wrestling bear she had occupied something similar in the rear of her owner's truck.

Marie crouched, approached the car, reached in and switched on the lights, then fled. The headlight beams revealed the extent of the downpour. Rain appeared to be as thick as wheat stalks.

Some time passed and Marie said, "If something isn't done we'll all die of pneumonia."

"What'll it be?" Martha asked. "If this is a call for volunteers, count on me. Could we jab her with sticks?"

"Emphatically no," Irene declared. "We'd be on the outside where she could get at us when she came out."

"She's never seemed fierce," Martha ventured. "I've heard of bears in national parks that are pets."

"A ranger once told me all bears are wild," Charlotte said. "But no one has passed this way for hours, and it looks as if we must do something. Let's go near the car and see what happens."

THEY approached the car and nothing happened. "Now, Marie," Martha urged, "you slip in behind the wheel. Leave the door open and I'll watch and warn you if she makes a move."

Again nothing happened. After awhile Marie started the motor and her three companions jammed themselves in the front seat. Marie switched on the dome light, then turned the rear vision mirror to check Old Lady Riley's movements.

"I'll drive slowly," Marie said, "and two of you watch the mirror. We'll leave the doors open and the instant the bear makes a move let me know. I'll stop and we'll all jump."

Marie limped along in low gear for a hundred yards, then went into second. Presently she was in high. "That bear acts as if she were exhausted," Charlotte said. "Maybe we can close the door and drive fast. If we drive fast enough we'll be arrested for speeding. Cops always show up when you are speeding."

"But they never show up when they're needed," Marie argued. She closed the door on her side and opened the throttle wide. The wheels fairly sang for the next hour. The windshield swipes whipped back and forth keeping the glass clear, the drenched highway leaped at them like an oncoming belt.

They passed the city limits sign and roared over an arterial highway without slackening speed. There were garages and filling stations open, but in Marie's opinion this was a police job—something men with guns should handle.

Any moment they expected to be picked up for reckless driving, but nothing happened. "Look!" Charlotte suddenly exclaimed. "There's a police garage." She pointed to a red sign two blocks ahead. "Drive right in."

"Okay," Marie answered.

Marie turned into the garage and then stopped the car gently. The instant the car ceased moving the four damp girls jumped out. A startled mechanic stared and dropped a wrench; a pair of motorcycle patrolmen straightened their shoulders and caps. Attractive young ladies didn't drop in informally every day.

"Will somebody get that thing out of our car?" Marie asked.

The officers noticed the bear for the first time and hastily closed the sedan doors. "My God!" one of them gasped. "Where'd you get it?"

"Brung 'im back alive!" a second exclaimed. "Or is it a hitchhiker?"

"It got in and we got out," Marie explained. "It stayed and when we were drenched we got inside and drove it here."

"It's either a tame bear or one that's gone crazy," one officer said. "A wild one would be tearin' the car apart." He telephoned and presently a police captain appeared. He was followed by several others wearing gold and silver stripes.

"Did you include the fingerprint man, too?" Marie inquired. "Everyone else seems to be here."

"The thing to do," the captain said, "is to get the bear out of the car and——"

"We made that remark hours ago," Marie said. "The question is—how?"

THE police went into a huddle. "Better bring Chris down," the captain said. "He's the champion wrestler of the West Coast police," he explained to the girls. "We can take you up to the jail and you can dry out and get some hot coffee," he added.

"We're staying here to see the fun," the girls answered.

Chris, a moose of a man, appeared in due time. The others got ropes and someone brought a sandwich. "One of you hold the sandwich," Chris directed, "the others stand ready. I'll rope her, then the rest of you get your ropes on her legs, around her neck and keep 'em tight."

The captain drew his service pistol. "I'll put a slug through her head if she becomes dangerous," he said.

Chris opened the door, then stood, with his mighty hands on his huge knees ready to shift right or left, retreat or advance as the situation demanded. Old Lady Riley noted the sandwich, then she studied the big man in front of the door. It stirred old memories. Her owner assumed such a crouch when he wrestled her. It was his signal for her to attack.

She crawled from the car to the concrete floor. Ropes zipped toward her head and missed. The next instant she had grasped Chris. The mighty policeman broke her first grasp, then the two moved like a whirlwind all over the place. Shouts filled the air and the captain kept bellowing, "Get clear, Chris and I'll finish her."

"I can't get clear," Chris moaned, "she's got a grip on me."

"Get a grip on her," the captain ordered.

"I do, but she breaks 'em!" Chris panted. He was twisting her paw. His face was purple with the effort, the perspiration pouring down in streams. Suddenly Old Lady Riley got the hold she

sought. She picked Chris up from the concrete and slammed him down with stunning force.

As he hit, Old Lady Riley pinned him to the floor. Then it was the captain who crouched, eager to get a bullet into the bear while he had the chance. But it was a mistake and, abandoning Chris, Old Lady Riley accepted the challenge. She struck the officer, knocking him flat. His pistol flew twenty feet through the air and struck without discharging. The bear lifted him up and dropped him, then held him down with both paws.

His eyes bugged out and he moaned, "Do something! Wait, don't do a thing. She might kill me in her death struggles. Everybody think hard."

"Hold everything," Chris shouted. "This bear's different."

"Are you telling me?" the captain demanded harshly.

"I'm telling everybody," Chris insisted. "She got a wrestling grip on me. And you'll notice she didn't chaw me when she had me down. And she ain't chawin' you, Captain. She's a trained wrestler, I tell you. Wait, I'll make a test."

HE SLAPPED Old Lady Riley on the back—the gesture of the referee declaring a winner of a fall. Old Lady Riley didn't smirk, nor beam, she merely stepped back and waited for the captain to rise. "See!" Chris exclaimed. "What'd I tell you. A wrestling bear. They had one up at Mount Rainier. She flopped a senator and caused a lot of trouble. I read about her in a sport magaine."

He stepped to the nearest telephone and called Rainier National Park. In due time a sleepy voice said, "Buck Seaton, park ranger, speaking."

Chris talked at length. From time to time he squinted at Old Lady Riley to check on certain scars the ranger mentioned. "Yes, it's Old Lady Riley all right. I don't know what she's been through, but the way her eyes are swole up I'd say—bees. She seems mighty tickled to get back to civilization again. Huh? What's that? I'll ask."

Chris turned. "Buck Seaton wants to know if any of you will drive Old Lady Riley to the park."

A mighty silence greeted the suggestion. "No, Mr. Seaton," he said, "nobody wants to drive her up. Huh? Oh, you'll come and get her. That'll be fine. She'll be in the garage. We're goin' to close all the doors and move out." He hung up and turned to the girls.

"The park publicity man is comin' too. You and Old Lady Riley are goin' to get your pictures in the paper. You'd better start slickin' up. That's what Old Lady Riley is doin'."

She seemed to know all was now well and that ahead lay attention, fine food and pictures, for the bear was calmly smoothing her heavy coat with her red, rough tongue.

MAKE THIS TEST WITH YOUR PIPE TOBACCO!

1. Do you think that you enjoy the *flavor* of tobacco chiefly through your sense of *taste?* Then make this astonishing test. Pinch your nostrils together while smoking. Notice that your tobacco becomes flat... tasteless... flavorless!

2. *Now let go.* Immediately the flavor returns ...proving that you enjoy the *flavor* of tobacco chiefly through your sense of *smell.* Flavor, you see, is produced only partly by the tongue...*largely* by delicately keen nerves at the back of the nose.

How we found FLAVOROMA for you

Flavor depends mostly **on your sense of smell. Knowing this, we set out to produce a pipe tobacco that would appeal to the senses of *both* taste and smell... in exactly the right proportions to produce finer flavor.**

And finally—in HALF & HALF—we produced a blend with the very special quality we were looking for... combining taste and aroma in *exactly* the right proportions.

We call that exclusive quality FLAVOROMA. It will add a richer, fuller pleasure to the comfort and enjoyment you get from your pipe.

Buy HALF & HALF today. Taste for yourself why FLAVOROMA is switching so many pipe-smokers to this finer-flavored tobacco.

Copyright 1933, The American Tobacco Company

THE TELESCOPE TIN gets smaller and smaller as you use it, makes tobacco easy to get at all the way down. No scraped fingers as you reach down for the last load. (Patent No. 1,770,920.)

Enjoy the FLAVOROMA of

HALF AND HALF

'FOR PIPE OR CIGARETTE

Adventurers All

A River-rat's Revenge

FEW people realize how dangerous is the game warden's job. We have to deal with all sorts of people, and get in some tight places. My encounter with a crazed "river-rat" was the closest call I ever had.

I was running White River in the Ozark Mountains with Don Owens, a new warden, checking nets and licenses of rivermen who earn their living fishing and gathering fresh-water mussels. Some of these rivermen are a lawless breed, and have been correctly named river-rats. They resent game and fish laws, and hate all game wardens.

It was late spring. We put our boat in at Cotter, intending to float to Batesville, about a hundred miles down the river. That section of the Ozarks is mostly rugged highland, thinly settled, and some of it is pretty wild. The weather was perfect and we were enjoying our trip down the clear swift stream. The rivermen were buying their licenses without complaint, for there was a good run of fish that year and the prospect of a profitable season ahead. Our boat was a sturdy, flat-bottomed skiff, with an outboard motor for motive power. I was running the boat and Don was riding in the bow, a husky young man of 28 years, clean and square-shooting. He would make a good warden, and I had high hopes for him. It was the second run he'd made with me.

Swinging around a bend of the river, I saw a shack on bank. I speeded the motor and headed for the boat landing, where some nets were drying. If you don't beat a river-rat to his nets he will make off with them to avoid paying the required license. And sometimes the nets are illegal, having a smaller mesh than the two and one-half inches specified by law.

I nosed the boat into bank and Don made the chain fast. We soon discovered that the nets were illegal, and I told Don we would have to arrest the owner. Looking toward the shack, we didn't see a soul. It seemed deathly quiet.

Although there was no one around, I saw signs of habitation—a thin curl of smoke rising from the stove-pipe chimney, a trot-line stretched to dry among the trees.

Don asked me if he'd better get his gun and I told him to get it and some shells for me out of the boat. Don hastened to comply, for he was new at this job and was anxious to make good. I kept a sharp lookout on the shack.

My companion returned and handed me some shells. As I started to put them in my gun I heard soft footsteps. Looking up quickly I saw a man appear around the corner of the shack. I looked him over closely as he came down the path toward us. He was a typical river-man, dirty and unshaven, wearing only a ragged undershirt and crudely patched trousers. He was gray with age and walked with a pronounced limp. As I looked down

at his feet a wave of pity swept over me. The old man had a peg leg.

My taut nerves relaxed and I felt that we had nothing to fear from this peg-legged old riverman. I felt sorry for him. I told him his nets were illegal and he would have to go to Batesville with us for trial. I even offered to arrange for him to pay his fine a little at a time, to make it as easy on him as possible. It didn't occur to me to search him, for he was so scantily dressed I didn't think there was a place about his person to conceal a weapon.

While I was talking he stood there sullen and silent. Then he started arguing, like all rivermen when they are caught red-handed. He reluctantly agreed to go with us, and I loaded the nets into the boat for evidence. I took my place at the motor, keeping my eye on the captive, and Don followed me into the boat. I told the captive to get in the front end of the boat and shove off. Then I took my eyes off him for the first time, turning my head to start the motor.

A wild curse ripped out behind me, ending up with, "You can't do this to me!"

It all happened so quickly that I didn't have time to get to my gun. A gun sounded and a bullet screamed by my ear. I whirled as another shot blasted. Don pitched down on the side of the boat, throwing me into the water.

I had blundered. A snake strikes when least expected. The river-rat was standing on the bank shooting at us point-blank.

THE water where I went in was over my head. While I was under I did plenty of thinking, believe me. My first thought was my gun; maybe it would shoot after the soaking. Pulling it from the holster, I considered rising to the surface and shooting it out. But the river-rat had the advantage of me, standing on firm footing with a few feet between us. I could expect no help from Don. From the way he fell, I judged he was hard hit, maybe dead.

Weighted by heavy clothing, I couldn't swim far under water. My frantic brain conceived the idea of coming up on the other side of the boat. But the rat would have a pot-shot at me any way I took it.

By this time my lungs were bursting. I had to do something. There was a possibility that my foe would miss the first shot and I would get in a shot. Under ordinary circumstances, I had confidence in my marksmanship. But the circumstances were far from ordinary!

One thing sure, I had to have air. Slowly I rose to the surface. Sunlight burst in my eyes. The blurred form of the river-rat loomed above me on the bank. In a hopeless gesture I raised my gun. Then I remembered.

The gun wasn't loaded!

When Don handed me the shells, the old man had appeared and, thinking him harmless, I had carelessly rammed the shells into my pocket. It was a foolish thing to do. I was at the mercy of a maniac, maddened by blind hatred for game wardens.

As my vision cleared, I discovered the old man tugging at Don's belt. Getting Don's gun! My companion was a lifeless hulk—done for. The old man seemed to be trying to pull him from the shallow water near the bank. Why? To serve as a shield from my gun-fire? I was an easy target, paddling on the surface, gasping for air. In my panic I wished the rat would shoot. Put a bullet through my brain and get it over with.

A voice reached my pounding ears. "You'd better come help me get your buddy out of the water," it said, "or he'll drown."

I could hardly believe my ears. It was the old man speaking. Wondering if it was a trick, I swam weakly to the bank.

"How bad are you hit?" he asked, and then I knew he wasn't tricking me. Now

that he'd got in his dirty work, his fit of anger had cooled.

"Never mind about me," I replied, raising Don's head out of the water. "Help me get this man to the hospital. He's hurt—bad."

A glance told me it was all over with poor Don. There was a neat bullet hole in his forehead and a larger hole higher up where the slug tore out. It was a wonder, but he was still alive though unconscious.

"Will you not kill me if I help you?" the river-rat whined.

"No," I told him, remembering all the time that my gun wasn't even loaded. "Put your gun in the boat and I'll do the same, then we'll take this man to Batesville."

The old man helped me get Don into the boat and held his head up so blood wouldn't strangle him.

"This man is going to die," he told me, "but I don't care. I'm even with you game wardens."

Don Owens died without regaining consciousness thirty minutes after I got him to the hospital in Batesville. The killer is in jail awaiting trial for first degree murder. It's a miracle I'm alive to tell about it, and from now on I'm taking no chances.

A snake strikes when least expected.

Harold Wales

$15 For True Adventures

UNDER the heading Adventurers All, *the editors of SHORT STORIES will print a new true adventure in every issue of the magazine. Some of them will be written by well known authors, and others by authors for the first time. Any reader of the magazine, any where, may submit one of these true adventures, and for every one accepted the author will be paid $15. It must be written in the first person, must be true, and must be exciting. Do not write more than 1000 words; be sure to type your manuscript on one side of the page only; and address it to: "Adventurers All," Care of Editors of SHORT STORIES, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Manuscripts which are not accepted will not be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope for that purpose.*

The STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

Circuit Riders of the Old West

"PREACHERS are supposed to be dynamite in action fiction, and I reckon they are," writes Caddo Cameron in connection with his story in this issue, "Folks who aren't religious may resent the presence of a parson in the story, and feel that the author is trying to take them to church," continues the author. "On the other hand, readers who are devoted to their religion may consider the author irreverent because of something the story preacher says or does, or the attitude of other characters toward him. So I did a lot of figuring before I permitted Andrew Jackson Potter to show his bearded face in this yarn.

"However, I believe that an attempt to catch some of the atmosphere of the Old West may quite properly show the preacher contributing his share toward making it what it was, provided he is drawn true to life. He rode up and down our frontiers in company with farmers, freighters, hunters, cowmen, outlaws, peace officers, and all the others; and if the truth were known, he was just about the most picturesque one of the lot. If we dig deep enough into the meager records of his experiences, we find numerous instances where his courage equalled if not excelled that of any other frontier character; and nine chances out of ten, we find him to be thoroughly human—unpretentious, straightforward, and easy to understand. Regardless of the fact that he rarely had a dollar to his name, he was a jolly fellow who loved a good joke and laughed as loud as anybody. In fact, after studying the lives of many of them, I'm positive that a circuit rider just naturally had to have a full-grown sense of humor to help him ride out the rough trails he traveled.

"But, in my estimation, his outstanding virtue was freedom from hypocrisy. He believed what he preached; and he believed it was his duty to preach, otherwise he wouldn't have done it since he got practically nothing for it. Often a circuit rider received less than a hundred dollars for a year's work, and he furnished his own transportation—horse or mule. More than once, a frontier mother has warned her daughter, 'Marry a circuit rider and starve.'

"Although our frontier Texas preacher sang sacred hymns, quoted Scripture by the yard, exhorted sinners, baptized, and fought tooth-and-toenail against liquor, card playing, horse racing, and all forms of immorality—he was mighty quick to drop his Bible and grab his gun when it came time to defend his congregation, community, or state. I've found but few instances where an old-time Texas preacher claimed the exemption from car-

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Short Stories

for AUGUST 10th

A long novelette of a long lost German treasure trove

DEATH WAITS FOR DIVERS

by

Wes Fargo

H. BEDFORD-JONES

"The Mysterious Disappearance of Sir Benjamin Bathurst"

FRANK GRUBER

A novel-length story of the struggle for land along the right-of-way

"Winner Gets All"

ARTHUR O. FRIEL

The Venezuelan jungle offers peril to all

"Drifter's Luck"

FRED MOORE - A. A. CAFFREY - RALPH CUMMINS

nal warfare, to which his calling entitled him. Jack Potter—'The Fighting Parson,' and Z. N. 'Wildcat' Morrell, are noted examples: there are many others, less famous but equally courageous and pugnacious.

"During the 70's and early 80's, Parson Potter was a familiar figure in Bandera where this story is laid. There are a number of people now living here who knew him, and the personal description I used was secured from those who remember him well—notably, J. Marvin Hunter, publisher of that excellent fact magazine *Frontier Times,* and founder of the *Frontier Museum* where you'll find everything from your great-grandmother's clay pipe to a Sharp's buffalo gun. Many of the things the parson says in this story are literal quotations from some anecdote that has been handed down; and elsewhere, I've tried to have him talk as I believe he would have talked. However, from start to finish, the action in this yarn is pure fiction.

"It may interest you to know that Parson Potter always said he wanted to die with his boots on—meaning, in his case, that he hoped to die in harness; and he did—dropped dead in a Caldwell County pulpit on the night of October 31, 1895.

"Caddo Cameron."

Legionnaires Can Take It

ALTHOUGH perhaps it is a bit unusual for two Americans to be members of the same Legion outfit—as in the thrilling Carse story in this issue—the French Foreign Legion as is known all the world over, embraces men of every nationality. No questions are asked as to a recruit's antecedents; an oath of allegiance to France is all that is required, and well has this oath been kept in the past. Desperate men who wish to escape from the past find in it a solution of their difficulties. Then there are the refractory soldiers who require severe discipline, and who are whipped into shape in the outfit. Last of all must be taken into account the men who are prompted by a natural taste for fighting and a craving for an adventurous life.

But, if a large portion of the Legion have antecedents into which one had better not inquire, it must be admitted they receive their reputations by their soldierly qualities. Whether it is due to the method of training or the natural aptitude for warfare of those who drift into the corps, certain it is that this varied material trains into a splendid body of men, and their reputation for valor compares with that of any troops in the world. The famous General de Negrier, who had such a potent influence over the Legion, and played a great part in its development, once said to his troops, "Some soldiers can fight; the legionnaires can die!" He had just cause for the statement, for time and again the corps have proved that death has no terrors for its men.

Strange to relate, the Foreign Legion owes its existence to a Belgian, Baron de Boegard, who conceived the idea of enrolling foreign adventurers for the service of France. Having obtained the consent of the authorities, he enrolled four thousand men of various nationalities and dubious character, and, having taken the oath of allegiance, they embarked at Marseilles for Africa.

This original draft was chiefly composed of desperate characters—gentlemen of misfortune, whose ragged appearance prompted the Arabs to christen them the "Bedouins from France." By an official edict dated March 10, 1831, they were designated the Foreign Legion, and were divided into seven battalions according to nationalities. The first three battalions consisted of Swiss and Germans, and the fourth battalion of Spaniards, the fifth of Italians, the sixth of Belgians and Dutchmen, and the seventh of Poles. But this method of separating the various nationalities was quickly abandoned, and the

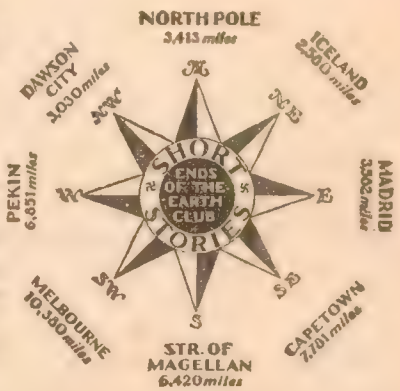
different elements were jumbled together. The question of language offered no difficulty, for the instructors were content with teaching the French words of command, and that was all that was necessary.

That a love of fighting is inherent in many men is attested by the history of the corps. As soon as they were engaged on active service recruits began to flock in from all corners of the earth. The monetary inducements were nil, seeing that the pay of the Legion is but a penny a day—the same as that of the ordinary French soldier. But these recruits were evidently of the right quality, for after much hard fighting they won Algeria, Syria, Indo-China and Morocco for France. Nor were their services limited to warfare. The first European buildings erected in North Africa were the work of the legionnaires, as in their ranks were architects, carpenters, masons, plumbers, doctors and lawyers, in fact representatives of the majority of professions and trades.

In the Crimean War the Legion fought with reckless bravery and suffered heavy losses. Twenty-nine officers and enlisted men were mentioned in dispatches by General Canrobert for their heroic conduct at Inkermann and Alma, and a large number were afterward naturalized for the services they had rendered. France was proud to embrace these outcasts of many nations. Following the Crimean War the Legion was busily engaged in fighting Arabs, Berbers, and Bedouins, and they also added to their gallant reputation as fighters in Mexico, being nearly wiped out in that country. The campaigns in Dahomey, in Madagascar, and in Morocco saw them sacrificing their lives in a prodigal manner. And they were second to none as fearless combatants on the Western Front during the World War.

The training of the Foreign Legion from the point of view of physical endurance is more severe than that of any troops in the world. They are taught to march to the very limits of physical endurance—even beyond. No pity is shown to the weakling. If he disgraces himself by falling out en route, he must take his chance of the consequences. The rule of the corps is "March or Die!" From a military standpoint such training is invaluable, but it means that the men in the ranks have to pay a heavy price. It is not the drastic martial law, the severe punishment for the smaller offenses, that makes the Legion a hard school, but the terrible gruelling marches in the full glare of the African sun.

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB



HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, c/o Short Stories, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Your handsome membership-identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.

A soldier looking for pen pals from everywhere.

Dear Secretary:

I have been reading your SHORT STORIES magazine for the past two years and like it very much. Most of my traveling has been confined to the States, although I have been to Scotland.

I would very much like to be a member of the Ends of the Earth Club, so please put my name on your register. I am twenty-two years old, five feet eight inches tall and weigh 158½ pounds. I would like to hear from anyone who cares to write.

Sincerely yours,
Private Gordon S. Bowman
Q. M. Detail,
Bolling Field, D. C.

And here's two more out-of-door enthusiasts.

Dear Secretary:

Would you please enroll us as members of the Ends of the Earth Club? We are cousins and both eighteen years old and would be pleased to receive letters from all corners of the earth. We are both interested in all outdoor sports and Don plays the guitar, trumpet and piano. We will exchange snaps and answers all letters.

Wishing SHORT STORIES all the best, we are,

Yours truly,
Nelson Matthews
Donald Matthews
Duff, Saskatchewan,
Canada

Has many tales to tell.

Dear Secretary:

I am hereby registering my name to make application for membership in your Ends of the Earth Club. I have been to many strange places, seeing strange things, and believe that I will be able to derive a lot of pleasure out of a unique club of this sort. I have many tales to tell, and hope to find an interested audience among other members of the club.

Please be kind enough to inform me of the workings of the club, and submit a card of membership to me.

Thanking you kindly, and looking forward to many pleasant connections through the Ends of the Earth column, I am,

Very truly yours,
William S. Herman
892 Bryant Ave.,
New York, N. Y.

There's always room for one more. We welcome you.

Dear Secretary:

Have you room on your page for one more member? I have been a reader of your magazine for a number of months. You have a magazine that has both complete stories and a variety. We can also see by the letters in the Ends of the Earth Club that it is read all over the world and I sure would be proud to become a member. I hope other members will write to me from all oyer the world.

Sincerely,
Eric G. Farmery
St-14-Rosa Linda Apartments,
Winnipeg, Canada.

James Hanover,
SHORT STORIES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City, N. Y.

I enclose these four coupons from SHORT STORIES.

Please send me a list of Ends of the Earth Club members interested in stamp collecting.

Name .....

Address .....

YOUR YOUTHFUL SKIN A MASS OF PIMPLES?

Take steps now to help keep your blood free of skin-defiling poisons

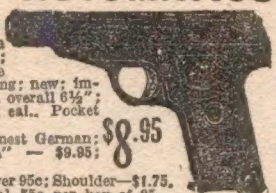
Stop being an object of shame and scorn among your friends. Find out what often causes those repulsive-looking pimples . . . and get rid of them.

Between the ages of 13 and 25 your body is changing rapidly. Important glands develop. These gland changes upset your system. Waste poisons from the intestines are often thrown into the blood stream and are carried to your skin, where they may bubble out in ugly, shameful hickies.

You must help keep your blood free of these skin-irritating poisons. Thousands have done so, just by eating Fleischmann's Yeast. The millions of tiny, *living* plants in each cake of this fresh food act to help you fight pimple-making poisons at their source—in the intestines, before they can get into the blood. Many get amazing results in 30 days or even less! Get Fleischmann's Yeast *now*. Eat 3 cakes a day—one before each meal—until your skin is clear and fresh again.

CLOSING OUT AUTOMATICS

10 SHOT 32 CAL.



Military Model F-129. Extra large frame, fine blued finish; extra long barrel to give balance to large magazine. Hard shooting; new; imported; accurate; safety; length overall 6½"; weight 30 oz., special $8.95; 32 cal., Pocket size, 8 shot—$7.95. Automatics:—25 cal. 7 shot; finest German vest pocket models. "Zehna" — $9.95; "Schmeisser," $10.95. $8.95

Open Holsters Auto.—75c; Revolver 95c; Shoulder—$1.75. Ammunition, 25 cal. 65c; 32 cal. 75c per box of 25. $2 Deposit required on C. O. D.'s. *None sold to minors. Bargain Catalog; S&W, Colts, Rifles, Air Guns, Telescopes, Knives, Police Goods, Badges, etc. Send 3c stamp.*

LEE SALES CO. (Dept. FN) 35 W. 32nd St., N. Y. C.

Used HOME-STUDY COURSES BOUGHT and SOLD

SENSATIONAL BARGAINS FOR YOU ! !

Educational books and used correspondence courses of every kind bought, sold, rented, exchanged. Old established concern guarantees 100 per cent satisfaction on every transaction. Write for FREE illustrated catalogues and full details. Send no money. Mail penny postcard today!

NELSON-HALL COMPANY, 754 Manhattan Bldg. CHICAGO

SONG POEMS WANTED AT ONCE

Mother, Home, Love, Patriotic, Sacred, Comic or any subject. Don't delay—send best poem today for immediate consideration.

RICHARD BROS., 27 Woods Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

GAMBLERS SECRETS EXPOSED

Cards 4 new ways to read 'em. Xray Cecthru know 1st, 2nd, and 3rd without taking card off top. Dice Missers Passers. Quit losing. Send $1.00 for new book "BEAT THE CHEAT." Invisible card ink. Slot machine. Punchboard exposes. Add 25 cents for 1938 catalog. Send $1.25 to SPECIALTY EXPOSE, Box 2488, Kansas City, Mo.

LAW STUDY AT HOME

Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Big corporations are headed by men with legal training.

More Ability; More Money; More Prestige

We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL. B. conferred. Successful graduates in every section of the United States. We furnish all text material, including fourteen-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 64-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send for them NOW.

LaSalle Extension—adult business training 775-L Chicago

SAVE THESE LISTS!

WITH hundreds of letters from new members coming in every day, it is obviously impossible to print all of them in the columns of the magazine. The editors do the best they can, but naturally most readers buy SHORT STORIES *because of the fiction that it contains. Below are more names and addresses of Ends of the Earth Club Members. Most of these members will be eager to hear from you, should you care to correspond with them, and will be glad to reply. Save these lists, if you are interested in writing to other members. Names and address will appear only once.*

Sam C. Z. Accrasy, St. Thomas School, Azumini, Via Aba, Nigeria, W. Africa
Alfred W. Amuchay, Railway Station, Omoba, Via Port Harcourt, W. C. Africa
C. L. Anderson, 550 West 20th St., New York, N. Y.
Gus Arahovitis, 450 Pacific St., Stamford, Conn.
Irebulaeke Ayaonwu, c/o Seth A. Didymus, Government School, Owerri, Nigeria, W. Africa
Howard W. Barnes, 1474 W. 29th St., Cleveland, Ohio
H. Becker, 104 W. 15th St., Linden, N. J.
Victor Benish, 3321 Maybury Grand, Detroit, Michigan
William Benke, 4661 Somerset Ave., Detroit, Michigan
Blackie Berger, 2142 N. Avers Ave., Chicago, Ill.
Jos. M. Bloomfield, 811 Madison St., Passaic, N. J.
J. W. Bluthe, Jr., Box 181, Pelzer, South Carolina, U. S. A.
Russel Bowman, Roosevelt Military Academy, Aledo, Ill.
James Brent, 334 East 123rd St., New York, N. Y.
Joe Brirley, 32 West Ellsworth St., Denver, Colo.
Edward W. Burns, 306 W. College Ave., State College, Pa.
R. L. Burke, 1111 West 34th St., Indianapolis, Ind.
Lupercio R. Camargo, S. Paulo, Brazil, S. A.
Joseph Capogrosso, 110 E. 116th St., New York, N. Y.
William J. Carson, P. O. Box 629, Port Alberni, B. C., Canada
Chela Cattank, San Vincente de TT, Casida F 2, Chile, S. A.
J. P. Childres, 136 Andrews St., Greenwood, South Carolina
Larry Christy, 2512 Gilmore St., East Elmhurst, L. I., N. Y.
Donald Q. Claunch, Veterans Admn. Facility, Whipple, Arizona
Wm. G. Cliff, 131a Mutual St., Toronto, Ont., Canada
Marine A. Coates, Cookshire, Rt. 3, Que., Canada
Eddie Cowden, 1117 Agnew St., New Castle, Pa.
Adolf Craen, 75 Van Luppenstr, 38, Antwerp, Belgium
Werner Cranz, Troop 15, 1241 N. 33rd St., Camden, N. J.
J. A. Cuomo, 75 Van Cortlandt Pk. Ave., Yonkers, N. Y.
Theodore Cyburyt, 33 George St., Adams, Mass.
Dave Daggett, 1140 N. Hudson Ave. Hollywood, Calif.
James A. Darby, 306 W. College Ave., State College, Pa.
Norman L. Dawson, 3734 Melon St., Phila., Pa.
William Dawson, 3825 Wallace St., W. Phila., Pa.
Robert J. Dilling, Apt. 1422, Windsor Tower, 5 Prospect Place, New York, N. Y.
Joseph Dinan, West Side Bachelor Club, Post No. 1, 47 Converse St., Wakefield, Mass.
Joseph De Cicco, West Side Bachelor Club, Post No. 1, 47 Converse St., Wakefield, Mass.
Norman Dionne, 275 H Union Ave., Laconia, N. H.
August Dreyfus, Congers, N. Y.
Milton Dubin, 195 Oak St., Binghamton, N. Y.
Edwin Dunau, 17½ George St., Adams, Mass.
Emanuel Ebeziako, c/o Ebenezer U. J. Member, Government School, Owerri, Southern Nigeria, W. Africa
Lewis R. Eccles, 10 Palisade Avenue, Yonkers, N. Y.
P. Edmunds, 7814—Fourth Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.
Alphonsus D. Ekeugu, c/o Ebenezer U. J. Member, Government School, Southern Nigeria, W. Africa
Alexander N. Emegha, c/o Ebenezer U. J. Member, Government School, Owerri, Southern Nigeria, S. Africa
John Erickson, 155 Hunt Avenue, Pearl River, N. Y.
A. Fannin, Iraan, Texas
Levi Fiberesima, c/o Seth A. Didymus, Government School, Owerri, Southern Nigeria, W. Africa
I. Fickel, 102 Harrison St., Marlin, Texas
J. J. Fowler, Township of Aba, Nigeria, W. Africa
Ralph Frank, 1905 Strauss St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Boys, 12 to 15, Make Money and Earn from our Big Prize Book

ANYTHING YOU WANT

WOW! Three hundred prizes for boys. Earn anything you want—including the de luxe streamlined Silver King aluminum bike shown at the left. Comes to you fully equipped with blast hornlite, coaster brake, platform carrier, rear-wheel stand, balloon tires. Has lock built in the steering fork. Sturdy bow-arch double-bar frame, built low.

Earn this bike, a coaster wagon, typewriter, movie machine or anything else you want. Make MONEY, too. It's easy! It's fun! Just deliver The American Magazine, Woman's Home Companion and Collier's to customers whom you obtain in your neighborhood. Do it in spare time. Many boys earn a prize the first day. So can you. Mail coupon *today* to start. State age.

Pilot your own model plane. The Grumann Gulfhawk shown at the right is a daisy. Look at that 3-bladed prop; notice the markings on the fuselage and the retractable landing gear. Earn it! Mail the coupon to start.

Popeye Watch

One of the swellest watches you've ever seen. It can be YOURS!

Streamlined Skates

When you begin rolling on these *streamlined* Globe skates you'll think you're on a bolt of greased lightning. You can earn them, any of 300 other big prizes, and make MONEY, too. Mail the coupon to start. Be the first boy in your neighborhood to get going.

Look at that 200-power microscope shown at the right! And a telescope, steam engine, wagon and a "Joe DiMaggio" baseball glove! Earn anything you want—or the whole lot! Make money at the same time. If you're not a boy between 12 and 15, show this offer to someone who is. Do it *now!*

Mail the Coupon to Start

Think of the fun you'll have—with all the prizes you want and your pockets full of spending money. It's easy for the ambitious boy. Some fellows earn a prize the first day. Get in the fun NOW and earn money and prizes for months to come. Mail the coupon to start. Be sure to give your age.

300 Big Prizes to Choose From!

Earn These Prizes

Mr. Jim Thayer, Dept. 812
The Crowell Publishing Co., Springfield, Ohio

Dear Jim: I want to make MONEY and earn a flock of PRIZES. Start me at once and rush me one of your beautiful 32-page Prize Books.

Name_____ Age_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____

BUSINESS GIRL—1938 MODEL—Office manager Olive Tucker keeps disarmingly calm despite nerve-nagging phones, buzzers, interviews. "If anyone needs healthy nerves, I do," Miss Tucker smiles. "Camels never upset my nerves." Later—to the roof gym for a quick work-out. Shower—rub—a Camel—and she's off again! Tired? Miss Tucker's answer: "Camels give my energy a refreshing 'lift.'"

Cigarettes may *look* alike—but what an appealing difference there is in Camels!

You'll be interested to read what Miss Tucker, successful young office manager, said to Miss MacGregor about the difference between Camels and other cigarettes (at right).

"I'm very glad you've brought that question up, Helen. I've tried as many kinds of cigarettes as most people, I guess, and I'm amazed at how *different* Camels are. Camels are extra-mild—they never bother my throat. And Camels taste good, yet never leave that 'cigaretty' aftertaste. In so many ways, Camels *agree* with me."

MISS TUCKER entertains *thoughtfully!* There are lots of Camels around. Miss Tucker says: "Camels are the favorite with my guests and are delightful for topping off a meal. During and after dining, I smoke Camels 'for digestion's sake.' Camels set me right!"

Copyright, 1938 R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. Winston-Salem, N. C.

A matchless blend of finer, MORE EXPENSIVE TOBACCOS—Turkish and Domestic

PEOPLE DO APPRECIATE THE COSTLIER TOBACCOS IN CAMELS

THEY ARE THE LARGEST-SELLING CIGARETTE IN AMERICA

ONE SMOKER TELLS ANOTHER "CAMELS AGREE WITH ME!"